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The Three Trappers.⁸⁴



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THE THREE TRAPPERS;

OR,

THE APACHE CHIEF'S RUSE.

BY SEELIN ROBINS,

AUTHOR OF "THE SPECTER CHIEF."

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THE THREE TRAPPERS.

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CHAPTER I.

CAMANCHES.

IT was now quite late in the afternoon, and Fred Wainwright reined up his mustang, and from his position took a survey of the surrounding prairie. On his right stretched the broad dusty plain, broken by some rough hills, and on his left wound the Gila, while in the distance could be detected the faint blue of the Maggolien Mountains.

But it was little heed he paid to the natural beauties of the scene, for an uncomfortable fear had taken possession of him during the last hour. Once or twice he was sure he had detected, off towards the mountains signs of Camanche Indians, and he was well satisfied that if such were the case they had assuredly seen him, and just now he was speculating upon the best line of retreat if such were the case.

"If they are off there, and set their eyes on me," he speculated, "the only chance for me is towards the Gila, and what can I do there?"

He might well ask the question, for it was one which would probably require a speedy answer. The Camanches, as are well known, are among the most daring riders and bravest red men on the American Continent, and when they take it into their heads to

follow up an enemy, one of three things is certain—his destruction, a desperate fight or a skilful escape.

The young hunter had no desire to encounter these specimens of aboriginal cavalry, for he was certain in the first place that there were half a dozen of them and that it would be madness to stand his ground, while his chances of eluding them were exceedingly dubious. Although mounted on a fine mustang, there was little doubt but what the Indians were equally well mounted, and he had little prospect of success in a trial of speed.

There was only one thing in his favor, and that was that night was close at hand. He was somewhat in the situation of the mariner when pursued by the pirate, who sees his only hope of life in the friendly darkness which is closing around. The young hunter looked at the low descending sun, and wondered what kept it so long above the horizon, and then he scanned every portion of the sky, to see whether no clouds were gathering in masses, which would increase the intensity of the darkness. But the sky was clear, although he remembered that there was no moon, and when night should fairly come it would be one of Egyptian gloom, which would give him all the shelter he wished.

At the precise point where the young hunter was journeying was a mass of tall grass, which partially concealed himself and horse, and which, as a natural consequence, he was reluctant to leave so long as he was sure that danger threatened him. His little mustang advanced slowly, his rider holding a tight rein and glancing toward the river, and then toward the hills on the right, from which he expected each moment to see the screeching Camanches emerge and thunder down toward him.

But as the sun dipped below the horizon the young hunter began to take heart,

“If they give me an hour longer, I think my

chances will be good," he muttered, growing more anxious each moment.

At one point in the hills he noticed a broken place, a sort of pass, from which he seemed to feel a premonition that the Indians would sally forth to make their attack; so before coming opposite he reined up, determined to proceed no further until it was dark enough to be safe.

He had sat in this position a half an hour or so, and the gloom was already settling over the prairie, when a succession of terrific yells struck upon his ear, and glancing toward the hills, he saw half a dozen Camanches thundering down toward him. The hunter at once threw himself off his horse, and resting his rifle on his back, sighted at the approaching redskins. They were nigh enough to be in range, and satisfied that they could be intimidated in no other way, he took a quick aim and fired.

Fred Wainwright possessed an extraordinary skill in the use of the rifle, and the shriek and the frantic flinging up of the arms, and the headlong stumble from his horse of the leading Camanche, showed that the fright of his situation had not rendered his nerves unsteady.

This decided action had the effect of checking the tumultuous advance for a few moments; but the hunter had been in the South-West long enough to understand the nature of these Camanches, and he knew they would soon be after him again. Springing on his horse therefore, he wheeled about without a moment's delay, and started at full speed on his back track.

Wainwright soon made the gratifying discovery that the speed of his own mustang was equal to that of the animals bestrode by the Camanches, and that even for a time he steadily drew away from them. But his own horse was jaded with half a days tramp, and could maintain this tremendous gait for comparatively a short period, while those of the Indians were

fresh and vigorous and could not fail soon to draw nigh him.

"However, if the fellow keeps this up for a half hour longer, we shall care nothing for them."

The little animal strained every nerve, and worked as if he knew the fate of himself and master was depending upon his efforts. The young hunter glanced over his shoulder and could just discern his followers through the gloom, they still shouting and yelling like madmen, as if they sought to paralyze him through great terror. He loaded his gun as he rode, and several times was on the point of turning and exchanging shots with them; but he did not forget there were two parties to the business, and that their return shots might either kill or wound himself or mustang, the ultimate result in each case being the same. So he gave his whole attention to getting over the prairie as fast as possible.

About fifteen minutes had elapsed when the crack of a rifle rung out upon the air, and the bullet whistled within a few feet of the head of the fugitive. He again loocked bak and could see nothing of his pursuers. At this juncture he struck in among some tall grass similar to that in which he halted when he first beheld the Camanches; and at the same instant he saw that his beast was rapidly giving out.

He hated to part with him but it could not be helped. Delay would be fatal, and reining his horse down to a moderate canter, he sprang to the earth and gave him a blow, which sent him with renewed speed on his way.

Then running rapidly a few rods the hunter dropped flat on his face and listened. All the time he heard the thundering of the approaching horsemen, but he did not dare to raise his head to look. They came nearer and nearer, and the next moment had passed by and for the present he was safe.

Not doubting but that they would speedily come up with the fleeing mustang and discover the ruse

played upon them, Wainwright arose to his feet and made all haste toward the Gila.

By this time it was very dark and he was guided only by a general knowledge of the direction in which it lay, and by the sound of its gentle flowing. Once along its steep banks he felt sure of being able to conceal himself, and, if needful, of throwing his enemies off his trail entirely, should they attempt pursuit, when it again became light.

Hurrying thus carelessly forward he committed a natural blunder but one which made him ashamed of himself. He walked straight off the bank a dozen feet high, dropping within a yard of a small camp fire, around which were seated two trappers smoking their pipes.

"Hullo, stranger, did you drop from the clouds?" asked one of them, merely turning his head without changing his position. The other turned his eyes slightly but did nothing more. "This 'yer what I call a new style of introducing yourself into gentlemen's society; shoot me for a beaver if it aint!"

"That it is," laughed Wainwright, "but you see I was in quite a hurry!"

"What made you in such a hurry?"

"I was fleeing from Indians —"

"What's that?" demanded both of them in a breath.

"I was fleeing from Indians, and was looking more behind than in front of me."

"That yer's what I call a different story," exclaimed the oldest, springing up and dashing the burning embers apart, so as to extinguish the light as soon as possible. It required but a few moments thoroughly to complete the work, when he turned to Wainwright and asked in a whisper:

"Mought they be close at hand, stranger?"

"I don't think they are."

"Have you time to talk a few minutes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then just squat yourself on the ground and tell us all about this scrape you 'pear to have got yourself into."

Our hero did as requested, giving a succinct account of what we have told the reader, beginning the narration at precisely the same point in which we did, and carrying it up to his "stepping off" the bank. The two trappers listened respectfully until he was done, when one of them gave an expressive grunt.

"Younker, you don't look as if you had two faces, and I make no doubt you've told us the truth; but it was qua'r you should happen to be trampin' alone so far away from the settlement."

"I was with a party of hunters this morning, but became separated from them and was on my return to the camp when I was shut off in the manner I have told you."

"Do you want to get back to them?"

"I aint particular," laughed the young hunter, with a peculiar expression. "It aint likely they have waited an hour for me when they discovered my absence, and so I should be at a loss to know where to look for them."

"Wal, it's all the same to us," said the trapper; "you don't look like a scamp, and you can stay with us, if you want to do so."

"You see, furthermore, that I have lost my horse, and shall have to take it afoot until I can buy or capture another."

"We can fix that up easy enough," grunted the trapper. "My hoss Blue Blazes can carry all that can get on his back, and we can give you a lift till you can scare up an animile of some kind or other."

It was plain that the trappers were really kind at heart, and were anxious to give the young hunter a "lift." They were rough in their manner and speech but the diamond is frequently forbidding in its appearance until it is polished, and the wonderful gem displayed.

While this trapper was conversing with the stranger, his companion had stealthily made his way down the bank some distance, where he had clambered up on the plain, and made a reconnoissance to assure himself that the "coast was clear." Discovering nothing suspicious, he had turned back again and speedily rejoined the other two.

The fire having completely gone out they were left in entire darkness sitting together on the bank of the Gila.

One of the trappers was short, muscular, with a compact frame, resembling in physique the renowned Kit Carson. His name was George Harling, and he hailed from Missouri, and was a hunter and trapper of a dozen years experience. He was generally mild quick and genial tempered, but when in the Camanche fight, or when on the trail of some of the daring marauders of the northern tribes, he was a perfect terror, fearless, dashing and heedless of all danger.

The second hunter who hitherto had maintained the principal part of the conversation with Wainwright was a tall, lank, bony individual, restless in manner and sometimes impulsive in speech, was called Ward Lancaster, and seemed to have tramped in every part of the country west of the Mississippi; for you could not mention a tribe of Indians, or a peculiar locality, but what he had been there, and had something interesting to tell about it.

He was about fifty years of age, with not a gray hair in his head, and with as gleaming an eye as he possessed thirty years before, when he first placed his foot on the western bank of the Father of Waters, and slinging his rifle over his shoulder, plunged into the vast wilderness, an eager sharer in the adventures and dangers that awaited him.

Ward was a pleasant, even tempered individual, who, when led into the ambush, and fighting desperately the dusky demons who were swarming around him, did so as coolly and cautiously as he galloped

over the billowy prairie. He was one of those individuals who seemed born to act as guide and director for parties traversing those regions, where it seems to a man of ordinary ability, fully a lifetime would be required to gain a comparatively slight knowledge. His instinct was never known to be at fault. When in the midst of the immense arid plains, which stretched away on every hand, until like the ocean it joined the sky; in the centre of these vast tracts, with man and beast famishing for water, and when no one else could see the clue, by which to escape from the dreadful situation, Ward displayed a knowledge or instinct, which to say the least, was extraordinary. Looking up to the brassy sky, and then away to the distant horizon, and then at the parched ground, he would fall into a deep reverie, which would last for a few moments, at the end of which he would start off at a rapid gallop toward some invisible point, and the end of that ride was — water.

When questioned as to the manner by which he acquired this remarkable skill, the trapper never gave a satisfactory answer. He sometimes said it must be that he scented the water; but, as it is well known that this element has no smell, taste or color, although the presence of vegetation, which it causes, and which is nearly always a sign of it, frequently gives out a strong odor, which guides the thirsty animal from a long distance, yet it cannot be supposed for an instant that the hunter acquired his wonderful knowledge in this manner. No human alfactories have ever been known to hold a hundredth part of the delicacy necessary for such an exploit. Ward always smiled; rather significantly when he gave such an answer.

It might be that he was really ignorant of the means by which he possessed such a superiority over his fellow creatures in this respect, and which made them only too glad to follow him to any point he indicated, without fear of consequences; or it may be that he had acquired some subtle secret of the "hidden

“springs” of nature—some knowledge of her means of working—so hidden from human knowledge that they can be reached by no process of reasoning, and are only discovered (which is rarely the case,) by accident.

Such a knowledge, or “gift,” as it is properly termed, is frequently found among the North American Indians—a people whose inability to grasp the simplest truths of art or science, is too well known to need reference here. Some withered old Medicine man, or wrinkled old woman, with her crooning and sorcery, is frequently the depository of a secret in medicines,—of the subtle working in certain forms of disease, of some apparently harmless plant, which when made known to the prying eyes of his pale faced brother, has made his fame and reputation and has given him a name for learning and skill, that has made him the enemy of the whole profession.

How many of the colossal fortunes of the present day have been builded upon the knowledge of some Medicine Man, or some negro woman who has gained a well founded reputation among the ignorant people.

So we say Ward Lancaster may have stumbled upon some secret of nature’s workings, which the jealous dame had carefully veiled from other eyes; and in the presence of this knowledge he never went astray.

The hunter was full of adventures, and could recount his experience by the hour as he sat smoking around the camp fire, at the end of the chase, or at the close of the day’s tramp. He had acted as guide to several expeditions which had crossed the Rocky Mountains into California and Oregon; and, at the present time, he and Harling were looking for a caravan or large emigrant party, which they had been sent from Santa Fe to intercept and guide into Lower California.

Having thus introduced somewhat at length our friends to our readers, we come to speak more parti-

cularly of their first meeting. They soon explained each other's name and destination to each other, when Ward seemed disposed to question Wainwright still further. He thought he saw about the young man signs indicating that he had followed this hunting and trapping business but a comparatively short time. His well shaped hands, had not the brown, hardy character which characterized those of his companions, and the jetty luxuriant beard failed to conceal the rosy-tinted skin, which could never have been retained under the storm and tempest of the prairie.

Wainwright, however, skilfully parried the questions when they came too close, or refused to answer them altogether.

"I belong further east," said he, "but there are some things which I don't choose to tell at present. The time may come when I shall be glad to do so, but it hasn't come yet."

"All right; that yer is what I call a hint to keep my mouth shet. Howsoever, you'll allow me to ask another question or two."

"Certainly, you may ask all you please," replied the young hunter, with a significant intonation.

"How long have you been on the prairies, and among the mountains?"

"A little over a year."

"Been with one party of hunters all the time?"

"No; with half a dozen, and once with a party of Indians."

"Have you learned any thing of the ways of the mountains and prairies in that time?"

"As I expect to be associated with you for son^t time, I will waive that question for a few months, and then allow you to answer it for yourself."

"That's sensible," grunted Harling, "I've only one more question to ax."

"I am ready to hear it."

"What brought you out here? A quarrel, love adventure, or what?"

"If any one asks you such a question tell him you are unable to answer it."

This was a decided reply, and the trapper so accepted it. They had conversed together in low tones, occasionally pausing and listening for any sound of their enemies, but they heard none—nothing breaking the stillness but the solemn flow of the dark river.

"I think," said Harling, "we had better move our quarters, for these sneaking Comanches can smell a white man, about as far as you can smell water."

"Yes, what I was a thinkin' on," muttered his companion, "Mo when-your-right, or Wainwright, you'll foller."

The three began stealing along the bank of the river, frequently pausing and listening, but as yet, hearing nothing suspicious. The sky had cleared somewhat during the last hour, and the clouds which had overspread it after the sun went down, and a number of stars were visible. Still it was very gloomy, the party being barely able to discern a few feet in front of them, as they advanced so stealthily upon their way.

Ward took the lead, his form being faintly visible, as he carefully picked his way, while behind him came Harling, and our hero, the young hunter, brought up the rear. The latter had heard them speak of their horses, and knew of course that they must be the owners of animals, which were so indispensable in this desolate country; but he wondered where they were kept, as he failed to see anything of them.

"However, I shall learn all in due time," was his conclusion, as they walked leisurely along.

They had progressed in this manner perhaps for a third of a mile, when the leader hastily scrambled up the bank the others following, found themselves on the edge of the prairie, which had witnessed the exciting chase between the Comanches and the young hunter, a few hours before.

By this time the sky had cleared and objects could be seen quite distinctly, for a considerable distance. The three men halted and looked out upon the prairie, but saw nothing but darkness.

"Where are your horses?" inquired Wainwright.

"About a mile from here."

"Aint you afraid of losing them?"

"Not much; they're lied where it would take a pair of sharp eyes to find them."

"But those Comanches ——"

"Sh!" interrupted the trapper, "I hear something walking."

They listened, and the faintest sounds of footsteps could be heard, quite hesitatingly, as if some one were very cautiously approaching them.

"Down!" whispered Ward, sinking silently to the earth, "whoever it is is coming this way."

The others were not slow in imitating his example, and lying thus upon the ground intently listening, they now and then caught a dull sound, as if made by an Indian carrying a heavy body, with which he retreated, as often as he advanced. A person who had had no experience of prairie life would have failed to hear the sound at all; but all three of our friends heard it distinctly.

Ward Lancaster had detected the direction of the sound, and was peering out on the prairie in the hope of discerning the cause of it. All at once he gave utterance to a suppressed exclamation, and then added, as he turned his head.

"What do you s'pose it is?"

"I am sure I cannot tell," replied Wainwright.

"It's a horse, and if I'm not powerful mistaken it's your own animal; but hold on; don't rise; it may be a trick of the Comanches to find out where you are."

The horse steadily advanced until a few feet of the prostrate men, when it pawed and snuffed the air. Ward then quietly arose, and before the animal could

wheel about, he seized the bridle and held it a prisoner. Wainwright then came up and found that it was his own mustang, with all his accoutrements complete.

"How fortunate!" he exclaimed in pleased surprise, as he examined the saddle and bridle; "every thing seems to be here."

So it proved, and Wainwright lost no time in putting himself astride of his mustang. Following the direction of his friends, they soon reached a small clump of stunted trees and undergrowth, where the trappers' horses were found. It was at first proposed that they should encamp here for the night, but, as the Comanches were unquestionably in the vicinity, they concluded to get as far away as possible. So they mounted their animals, and under the leadership of Ward took the river for their guide, and rode at a moderate walk until daylight, by which time they had placed many a long mile between themselves and their dusky enemies.

The hunters scrutinized every suspicious point and took a careful survey of the surrounding prairie and hills, but discovered nothing suspicious, and they concluded that there was nothing further to fear from these wild riders of the plains.

The range of hills was still in sight, and offered a secure hiding place for any of their enemies who chose to conceal themselves there, but if such were the case, the trappers were confident they could detect them, and failing in this they believed themselves justified in coming to the conclusion mentioned.

Ward took his bearings and headed towards a point where he hoped to intercept the emigrant train; but when night came they had not yet reached it, and they encamped in a small grove. Wainwright had brought down an antelope with his rifle, at such a distance as to extort a compliment from the hunters, and thus bountifully provided for supper, they counted upon a pleasant evening.

CHAPTER II.

IN CAMP.

"Come, George, isn't that steak done yet?" inquired the impatient Lancaster. "It strikes me that it has just got the color to insure a good taste. What do you think Fred?"

"I'm hungry enough to make anything taste good to me, stewed, fried or raw."

"Now just keep easy," replied Harling. "When the meat is ready you shall have it—not before—no matter how hungry you are."

"Woofh!" exclaimed Lancaster, "if I get much hungrier, I'll eat the meat up and take you by way of desert. So hurry up, will you?"

Not the least attention did the imperturbable cook pay to the murmurings of those around. He turned the meat around as slowly and carefully as ever, and when it had reached the point when Lancaster declared it was "spoiled" he removed it from its perches, served it into three equal slices, and announced that it was ready.

So it proved—rich, steamy, juicy and tender, so that it fairly melted in their mouths. No sooner did it touch their palates, than they inwardly thanked the cook for resisting their importunities, and furnishing them with such a choice morsel. They thanked him inwardly, we say, but, as might be expected, each took particular good care to say nothing about it.

But Harling saw his advantage and followed it up. "You're a couple of purty pups, aint you? Don't

know what's best for you. If it wasn't for me, you'd both starve to death."

"Get out!" replied Lancaster, "let other people brag up your cooking; don't do it yourself."

"There's no one in this crowd got gratitude to thank me after I've crammed their mouths for them."

"Then I wouldn't do it myself," laughed Fred Wainwright.

"Yes, I shall too, for it deserves it, and it's time you learned to say so."

"Hang it," cried Lancaster, pretending to have great difficulty in tearing the meat asunder; if this piece hadn't been cooked so long, it would be fit for a white man to eat, but as it is, it is enough to tear my teeth out."

"Cause you're making such a pig of yourself. Try and eat like a civilized being, and you'll find it tender enough for an infant."

"How do you find it Fred?" turning toward their younger companion.

"I can manage to worry down a little."

"I should think you could!" was the indignant comment of the cook, as his friends swallowed the last mouthfull.

The darkness slowly settled over prairie and mountain, and when the hunters had gorged themselves with meat, so rich and juicy that they could not conceal their delight, they wiped their greasy fingers upon their heads, produced their pipes, lay back and "enjoyed themselves."

Although in the midst of a hostile country, all three were too experienced to feel any apprehension regarding their safety. This fire had been so skilfully kindled at the bottom of a hollow, so artfully, that a lynx-eyed Apache or Comanche might have stood within a hundred feet of them without suspecting its existence. Their horses, too, had been trained long enough in danger and peril to know the value of silence on a dark night and in a still country; and there

was no fear of their discovery by hostile eyes through any indiscretion on their part.

From long exposure to danger, the hunters had acquired a habit of speaking in low tones, and frequently pausing and listening before making responses to a question. When they laughed, no matter how heartily, it was without noise, except out upon the broad prairie, when their cramped up lungs demanded freedom, and then their laugh rang out clear and loud, like the blast of a silver trumpet.

Even as they smoked, the coal in their pipes was invisible. They had a fashion unknown to us of more civilized regions, of sinking the coal or burning part of the pipe below the surface of the tobacco, by a few extra long whiffs, so that, as they leisurely drew upon them afterwards there was no fear of the red points betraying their presence, a thing which has more than once taken place in the early history of our country.

The party drew at their pipes in quiet enjoyment for some time, and then, as the night was pleasant and warm they fell into an easy conversation.

"I wonder whether we shall come upon the caravan tomorrow," remarked Fred Wainwright, not because he imagined there was any thing particularly brilliant in the remark, but for the same reason that we frequently say a pointless thing—because we can think of something better.

"P'raps we shall, and p'raps we shant," was the non-committal answer of Ward Lancaster.

"You are right for once," said Harling. "No matter whether we see 'em or not there isn't much danger of you prophesying wrong."

But I really think we are somewhere in their vicinity and we shall see something of them tomorrow—some sign at least that will give us an idea of their whereabouts."

"Are you sure this emigrant train is where it can be found?" asked Fred Wainwright.

"Yes, sir. I said that; I understand it, which is a blamed sight more than either of you two lunkheads could do. The fellow was in earnest about it. Didn't you see Harling how quick the feller came straight at me, and talked to me like a man whose life depended on his getting my service."

"Did he go far enough to offer a price?" inquired Harling, rather quizzically.

"Yes, sir," was the triumphant reply. "He hauled out several yellow boys, and wanted to put them in my hands to seal the bargain."

"You took 'em, of course?" remarked Fred in a serious tone, but taking advantage of the darkness to grin to an alarming extent.

"No sir!" was the indignant response. "I told 'em I took money after I'd done a thing—not before. He seemed quite anxious and urged me to take it saying it was a-ahein-a-rainen.strainer."

"Retainer." accented Fred.

"Yes; something like that; don't know what it means, but I told him I did not do business in that way. I axed him all about the company and learned all I wanted, and then told him when it reached 'Old Man's Point,' I'd be thar!"

"How near are we to it?"

"About ten miles off; we'll ride there before breakfast tomorrow, and take our first meal with the party."

"What became of their guide?"

"The guide was shot by an Apache Indian two days ago, and the party have been half frightened to death ever since. They declared, if they could not find a guide, they would never enter California; as you can see we've good reason to 'spect they'll be rather glad to have our company."

"It seems singular that the very man upon whom they relied, and the one who no doubt knew more about the Indians than all the others combined, should be the very first one to fall a victim."

"How do you know he was the first one?" demanded Ward Lancaster, almost fiercely, as he turned his face toward Fred Wainwright.

"I don't know it; only imagined it from the remark you made."

"Well, perhaps he was the first one," was the com. placent remark of the hunter, as he resumed his pipe. "I don't know neither to the contrary notwithstanding."

"Then it's my opinion you'd better keep your mouth shet," was the comment of Harling. "Them people that don't know nothing, gain the most credit by saying nothing."

"That's the reason you keep mum so much of the time, I 'spose. Wal, that's right; you ought to know yourself; don't let me change your habits, because that is a mighty good habit you've got."

"It strikes me it would be a good habit for us all to follow at this time," suggested Fred Wainwright. "It is getting late, and I feel like going to sleep."

"Go ahead then," said Ward.

"But the hour was growing late, and shortly after the three hunters were wrapped in profound slumber.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMANCHES AND THEIR PRIZE.

The gray dawn of early morning was just beginning to break over the prairie when the "Trappers of the Gila" were active. Such men are invariably early risers, unless they have been deprived of several night's rest, and desire to make it entirely up at one stretch.

Harling's culinary skill had given him the position of caterer to the company's appetite, and from what has been mentioned in the preceding chapter, there will be but little doubt but that he had succeeded admirably.

The time to which we refer being quite modern, the party always went provided with lucifer matches, instead of resorting to the use of the tedious flint and tender. Of course they were easily carried in such a manner as to be impervious to damp, and to be reliable at all times.

Abundant fuel was close at hand, and not five minutes intervened after their rising, when a bright fire was crackling and snapping, and the cook had another goodly-sized piece of antelope steaming and sizzling, giving out an odor enough to drive a hungry man distracted. A clear icy cold stream a hundred yards away, afforded them the means of performing their morning ablutions.

The breakfast was hastily swallowed, and just as the first beams of the morning sun came up the eastern horizon, the three hunters, mounted on their animals,

were galloping over the prairie, toward Old Man's Point, quite a noted place, which could be distinguished on the plains for a distance of twenty miles.

At the very moment of starting, Lancaster looked to the north, where a dark point, apparently the size of a man's body could be distinguished. This he announced was the point of rendezvous, so well known to parties crossing the plain and passing into Lower California. As it was in plain sight, all the party had to do was to ride straight toward it.

The hunters were galloping in this leisurely manner, when Fred Wainwright suddenly exclaimed with no little excitement,

"Yonder come the emigrants this very minute."

As he spoke he pointed away to the east, where in the distance could be seen a cloud of smoke, as if made by the trampling of animals. Nothing else could be distinguished, but a moment's glance sufficed to show unmistakably that it was not natural clouds, such as an inexperienced eye would pronounce it, but it was the fine dry powder of the parched prairie raised by the passage of multitudinous feet.

From the distance and through the haze nothing at all could be discovered of those who were "kicking up the dust." The fact that it was very near that quarter from which they expected the coming of the emigrant party, and that it was at the very time they were looking for their coming, argued strongly for their being their friends. But neither Harling nor Lancaster were quite satisfied on this point.

Reining their horses down to a slow walk, they gazed long and fixedly in the direction of the tumult, and finally the sharp-scented trapper exclaimed:

"They aint white men; they're Injins!"

"How do you know that?" inquired Fred.

"I can smell 'em!"

This, however, was an attempt to be facetious, and the hunter condescended to give his reasons for holding such strong suspicions.

"You see there is too much dust, in the first place, for a party of white folks."

"You know the prairie looks as if it hadn't rained for six months, and we have left a trail behind us, something like a Mississippi steamer leaves, when she throws every thing she has on board into her furnaces, for the sake of beating her rival. Just look behin' you and see what a cloud you have left in the air."

"Yes; I know," returned Lancaster, without turning his head. "And that's just the reason for them 'ere thieves off yonder being redskins. We've had our horses in a gallop, and their hoofs have kicked up this dust, an that's just what has been done over yonder. You have heard, I suppose, that emigrant parties aint apt to go 'cross the plains on a full canter. you've larn't that I 'spose, haint you?"

"I've learnt it now if I didn't know it before," laughed Fred, "You know there may rise occasions for them to put themselves at their highest speed, as when a party of Indians come screaming down upon them."

Lancaster shook his head.

"You're mistook there, my friend; you're mistook there. I've guided many a party through the Rockies and across the plains, and some of 'em from St. Louis and Independence, and I never yet seed that thing done. 'Cause why, it would be all tom-foolery, with their loaded wagons, and jaded horses and sleepy oxen; such a thing would be impossible—yes, sir, impossible, even if all the Injins were on foot. You see, don't you?"

Wainwright could not deny the force of what the hunter said, and much against his will he was led to believe that a party of hostile Indians were rapidly nearing them. This, while it gave the hunter no uneasiness as regarded themselves, looked as though the emigrant train had gotten into trouble, and on that account the three horsemen were more apprehensive

than they would have been under ordinary circumstances.

In the mean time the agents in this cloud of dust were rapidly nearing the party of hunters, who, with their horses upon a slow walk, were attentively watching for some further evidence of the identity of these enemies.

"Hark!" admonished Harling, raising his hand with a gesture of silence.

All bent their heads and listened. Faintly through the turmoil and confusion, they caught the sound of shouting, as though the parties were calling to each other; at the same time a faint rumble or trembling was heard which showed that numerous animals were tramping the prairie.

"Doesn't it look as though the emigrants were in trouble?" asked Fred, with an expression of familiar alarm. "I do hope they haven't been attacked."

"It is a party of Injins driving a lot of animals," said Harling. "They have stampeded them, and if you listen very hard you can hear the tramp of their feet."

"But the shouting?"

"All as matter of course. They have got the animals on a full run, and are shouting and yelling at them to keep them going. Hark! How much plainer you can hear 'em?"

Such was the case; the fearful whooping of the excited redskins coming to their ears with great distinctness. Suddenly Lancaster's face brightened.

"I understand now what it all means. A lot of thieves have stampeded a drove of sheep and have 'em on the full run so as to get them as far away from recapture as soon as possible."

"They must be Apaches, then," remarked Fred.

"No, sir," and the hunter pressing his lips, "them's *Camanches*."

"What are they doing as far up as this?"

Lancaster looked at the interlocutor in surprise, and then repeated.

"As far up as this!" Ten years ago I seed a party of over twenty Comanches along the Yellowstone, a thousand miles from here, and I've seen hundreds of 'em 'atween here and there."

"I thought they rarely came so far north. I have never seen any of them till yesterday."

The hunter laughed as he answered.

"There's no need of your taking the trouble to tell us that; I never 'sposed you have. True, the most of 'em sticks down in New Mexico, Texas and around there, but they often come further north, just to get a chance to stretch their limbs."

"But how can you tell them from the Apaches who resemble them so closely?"

"That is rather a nice point, I'll own," said Lancaster, "with some professional points, but the fact is, that since we've been sitting on our horses, riding and listening, I've heard a scream given by one of the dogs, that I've heard afore and that always came from the throat of a full blooded Comanche."

"It strikes me that if such is the case, the best thing we can do is to get out of this region as rapidly as possible.

This was really the most sensible remark Fred Wainwright, had made for some time; and feeling it to be such, he was not a little confused to see that it attracted scarcely any attention. Finally, Lancaster, who was still looking toward the tumultuous crowd which was passing toward them, remarked,

"They're going to pass to the north of us, between us and the Point."

"But they'll see us."

"What if they do?"

"Why we shall have a chase and all for nothing too, and be kept away the whole day from joining the party who are looking as anxiously for us."

"See here, youngster," said the trapper, turning to-

ward their younger companion. " You're talking about something that you don't know nothing about. These Comanches are stealing them sheep, and they want to get along with them as fast as they can, if not faster; they have got no time to stop and fight, no matter how bad they want to."

" You've guessed right, for once in your life," remarked Harling, " you can see that the drove have turned to the north, and when they pass us there will be a good half mile between the Comanches and us."

Lancaster looked inexpressible things and kept silence.

The remark of the hunter, or rather his prediction came true. In a few minutes, through the dust and smoke, they could distinguish the forms of Indians mounted on their mustangs, dashing hither and thither in the most rapid evolutions, while the affrighted sheep huddled together, or piled pell mell in their frantic attempts to make faster time. The Comanches displayed the most extraordinary skill in horsemanship, darting hither and thither, sometimes under their horses belly, then over his neck, and in every conceivable position.

The Indians discovered the hunters at the same instant that the latter saw them; but they did not give them the least heed. They were too numerous to fear any thing from the white men, and they knew they had too much shrewdness to disturb them; and so the mortal enemies passed within a comparatively slight distance of each other, with no other evidence of recognition than a mutual scowl of hate.

The hunters waited until a portion of the thick dust had settled, when they resumed their march for the point where they expected to meet the approaching emigrant party.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EMIGRANT PARTY.

The dust raised by the multitudinous drove of sheep was so dense, as almost to suffocate the trappers as they rode along, even when they waited till the yelling, gyrating Comanches were far in the west with their terror-stricken animals.

A thin coating of the powder settled upon their garments, so that when they emerged with the free air beyond, they were all of a yellowish white color; but a vigorous brushing and shaking of their clothes speedily resumed this, and they became themselves again.

A half hour later, the party reached the "Old Man's Point," but as they swept the horizon, saw nothing of the approaching emigrant train. The rocks themselves were a mass of irregular boulders piled above each other to the distance of fully a hundred feet, while the base covered an area of fully a quarter of an acre, so that no better spot could be selected as a rendezvous, or from which to take observations.

"Fred, go to the top and take a look!" said Lancaster, "I expect they must be in sight."

"I was just thinking of doing so," was the reply of Wainwright, as he dismounted and began clambering up the rocks. His agility soon carried him to the top, and shading his eyes with his hands, he looked off toward the east a moment, and then called out,

"*They are coming!*"

"Make right sure," called Lancaster back to him.

"for you are powerful apt to make blunders in this part of the world. Be you sure they ain't Comanches or Apaches or some other party of stragglers."

"I can see the white tops of their wagons"

"I guess you're right then," was the comment of both the hunters below, as they considered that this fact established the other truth.

Turning their heads in the direction indicated they were able to discern the caravan, at that great distance, apparently standing still, but, as they knew, moving as rapidly as possible toward them.

Having assured himself that it was all right regarding them Fred Wainwright turned his gaze toward the vanishing Comanches and their stolen sheep. There was no difficulty in locating them, as the vast volume of dust indicated their whereabouts as unmistakably as does the smoke the track of a fire on the prairie.

The young hunter observed something which struck him as rather remarkable. The Comanches, after reaching a point, when it was plain they could not be discerned by any one, standing at the base of the Rock, made a bend fully at right angles to the course they had been pursuing. This they continued, until they grew faint and finally vanished from sight altogether.

This rather puzzled Fred until he mentioned it to the two hunters below when he descended, when Harling explained its meanings. From whomsoever the Comanches had stolen the sheep, it was evident they had fears of pursuit. It is the easiest thing in the world to follow a sheep trail over the prairie; but, if the pursuing party should ever happen, for the sake of convenience, to leave the trail, they would be very apt to take a general direction in their pursuit, without going to the trouble of keeping to the main path. In this manner, unless some such ruse were suspected, they would never notice the change in direction made by the thieves, and thus give the latter just what they

wanted, sufficient time to get themselves and their prizes into safety.

But the emigrant party was now close at hand, and Fred reascended the rocks and waived his hat as a signal that all was right. This demonstration relieved them in a great degree, for upon discerning the figures, the company had come to a dead halt, and seemed to be consulting together; but now they immediately moved forward; and as the trappers moved out to meet them, the two parties speedily mingled with each other.

The emigrants numbered about a hundred,—ten wives, a young woman, a half dozen children, while the rest were strong, stout bearded men, well-armed, and willing to dare anything in the defence of their property. They had got pretty well used to Indians, storms and danger in coming thus far, and felt considerable confidence in themselves.

"But we've never traveled this way before," remarked Mr. Bonfield, a pleasant, middle aged man, who by virtue of having the largest family, and owning almost all the horses and wagons, was looked upon as a sort of leader in the enterprise; "and, of course we aint acquainted with the route. We engaged a capital guide at St. Louis, but several days ago he was shot."

"He oughter known better than that," remarked Lancaster; if he learned enough to be a guide, he oughter learned enough to take care of himself."

"He did; but this was one of those things which sometimes happens when we don't dream there is any danger. He and Templeton here were chasing an antelope, just at sunset, when they struck him, and he limped a short distance, and finally tumbled over in a small grove not a half mile distant from camp. Of course they dashed after him, when, just as they went down into the timber, I saw a flash from behind one of the trees, the poor fellow threw up his arms, rolled off his horse and fell dead to the ground. Templeton

dashed on into the grove, when a single Apache warrior on foot, started on a run across the prairie, but he hadn't taken a dozen leaps, jumping from side to side, so as to distract his aim, when he put a ball through his skull and laid him dead in his track. I suppose, when the Apache saw them coming, he knew it meant sure death to him, and as he did the best he could—shot one and run for it; but who of us, if we had been in the guide's place would not have done precisely as he did?"

" You're right," replied Harling. " What was his name?"

" Hackle."

" Joe Hackle?" asked Lancaster, with considerable interest.

" That was it."

" Poor Joe; he and I trapped together for three years on the upper forks of the Platte, and a braver or better fellow never lived. He knowed every mile of ground between the Mississippi—that is if you follow the route travelers generally take."

" And that reminds me that we were told that we should find Mr. Ward Lancaster, and George Harling at this place, and that they would act as our guides into Lower California. I presume you are the gentlemen?"

" Well, yas," replied Lancaster with a huge grin, " I s'pose we be: that is I'm Ward Lancaster without the *Mr.*"

Mr. Bonfield laughed; for he evidently understood what it all meant. The emigrant he it remembered had halted, and the leader and several of the men had advanced a hundred yards or so, and were consulting with the hunters. The rest of the emigrants were busy attending to their animals, or to themselves and their private affairs.

" Can we engage you as guides?" asked the leader, unable to conceal his eagerness.

"I rather think so, as we come out here for that thing."

"There'll be no difficulty about the compensation; for we need a guide badly enough. Most of my party had concluded to halt here and wait until we could procure one; and, although I opposed this conclusion, I should have disliked very much to have penetrated further into this country, which is entirely unknown to every one of us."

"It wouldn't have done," said Wainwright. "You would have lost your way among the mountains and every one of you would have been picked off by the Indians before a week had passed over your heads."

"So I thought; or else taken prisoners."

"Those Indians in these parts, aint apt to take prisoners, unless the are in the form of valuable animals, or fair women."

"He is right," said Lancaster, deeming it necessary that the statement should receive his endorsement before he could pass for genuine in such a promiscuous company.

Mr. Bonfield and Lancaster now went apart by themselves for a few moments, and talked together in low tones. They soon rejoined the others when the trapper announced that the arrangements were completed, and they were to accompany the party to their destination, which was Fort Mifflin, on the western side of the Coast Range, or Rocky Mountains, in the midst of a gold region. At the little town which encompassed this fort, were a dozen of their friends, who had been there a couple of years, and who had sent for them. They had a young lady, whose father was the principal man at Fort Mifflin, and who had sent for his daughter to join him, at the time the party crossed the plains.

The preliminaries being settled, the party rode back to the emigrant train, made the acquaintance of the others and the march was resumed. They had all breakfasted, and it was concluded to make no halt

until they reached a small stream, which Lancaster hoped could be found by noon, when they could rest as long as they chose.

"What part of the States are you from?" inquired Fred Wainwright, of the gentleman who had been referred to by the leader as Mr. Templeton.

"Missouri," was the reply.

"Ah! what part of it?"

"From the capital."

The young hunter could not avoid an exclamation of surprise, uttered so naturally that the emigrant turned abruptly toward him.

"Are you from there?"

"I—ahem!—I know several persons from that part of the country—that is I used to know them, but it is a good while ago."

Mr. Templeton gazed at him sharply, and remarked by way of explanation of his apparent rudeness:

"Most of us are from there, and I thought at first there was something in your voice that was familiar, but I don't remember your name. We have a young lady—Miss Florence Brandon, whose name you may have heard, as she was a belle at home."

"I think I have heard of her."

"Would you like to renew your acquaintance with her?"

"No; I thank you; we hunters are hardly in a condition to appear in the presence of refined ladies, as I judge Miss Brandon to be, and our lives are such that we should cut a sorry figure, if we attempted to do so."

"But you talk like one who has not always led hunter's life."

"I have some education, but at present, I am simply a hunter and trapper."

Florence Brandon! Little did Mr. Templeton dream of the strange emotions awakened in the breast of Fred Wainwright, the young hunter, at the mention of that name.

CHAPTER V.

LEONIDAS SWIPES, SHEEP DEALER.

The sun had barely crossed the meridian, when the emigrant party reached a small stream of water, and made midday halt. The animals were fed, dinner cooked and eaten, pipes smoked, and everything done in accordance with the time and circumstance.

Fred Wainwright did his best to appear natural, but since the mention of Florence Brandon's name, his heart had been stirred, as it had not been stirred for many a day. Old emotions which he imagined were dead had —— but enough for the present.

When the call was made for dinner, he saw a young lady descend from one of the large baggage wagons, so remarkably handsome, as to cause an exclamation of surprise and admiration from all who had not seen her. The young hunter started and gasped, and then passed his hand over his face, as if to make sure that his massive beard was there, then he slouched his hat so as to be sure the fair girl could not possibly recognize him.

At meal-time, he managed to keep a goodly distance from her; and, when pressed to go forward and make himself known, he resolutely refused, and acted very much as though he had a mortal terror of Miss Florence Brandon.

The allotted time for rest had expired, and the party were making ready to move on again, when three strangers made their appearance mounted on rather sorry looking nags. Two of them were dressed in half

civilized costume, with shaggy, untrimmed beards and hair, and a remarkable talent for saying nothing except when directly appealed to. The third would have attracted attention in any part of the world,—being nothing more nor less than a genuine, traveling Yankee, dressed in precisely the same suit of clothes in which he left his own native Connecticut a year before. A huge, conical hat surmounted a small head, from which sprouted a mass of yellow hair, a portion of which protruded through an opening in the top, while the rest hung down over his shoulders. Sharp, grey eager eyes, a thin peaked nose, a yellow tuft of hair on the chin, prominent cheek bones and bony, angular muscular frame, completed the noticeable points in the most talkative character in the group.

While the party were as yet nearly a hundred yards distant, the Yankees called out,

"Say, you folks, have you seen anything of any stray sheep in these parts?"

The earnest simplicity with which this question was asked brought a broad smile to the face of all who heard it. Lancaster asked as the three horsemen rode up,

"Have you lost any?"

"Ye-s! a few."

"How many?"

"Five thousand, four hundred and twenty eight."

From the remark of the horseman, it was evident that the flock of sheep stolen by the Comanches belonged to him and his party. Lancaster, therefore had no hesitation in replying,

"We seed a drove of almost that size go 'long this morning."

"Did you count 'em?"

"I rather think not."

"Pretty good sized drove?"

"Right smart size."

"Who was driving on them?"

"A half dozen Comanches."

"There's our sheep!" exclaimed the horseman clapping his knee and turning his face toward his companions, who merely looked their reply without speaking.

"Now, aint that mean!" he asked, turning back again toward the trappers and emigrants. "My name is Leonidas Swipes, and me and these two gentlemen left New Haven, a year ago last April. All three of us teached school in districts that joined, but we concluded we was intended for better business, and so we put our heads and purses together and started for California."

"What were you doing with such a number of sheep!" asked Mr. Bonfield.

"Taking 'em into California where mutton is five times as high as it is east."

"But where did you get the sheep!"

"Wal, the way on it was this," replied Mr. Swipes, ejecting a mouthful of tobacco juice, rolling his quid to the opposite cheek, and assuming a position of ease. "We started from St Louis just at the beginning of Spring, lost our way and afore we knowed it fetched up in Santa Fe, five hundred miles off our course. Of course, we were considerably riled to think we had made such fools of ourselves, but there was no help for it, and we soon found there was as good chance to make money in Santa Fe, as in any other part of the world."

"Yes," said Harling, "it is one of the greatest gambling holes this side of the Mississippi."

Mr. Swipes instantly straightened himself with righteous indignation.

"You don't s'pose we ever gamble? No, sir; such things are frowned upon in Connecticut, and there aint one of this party that can tell one keerd from another. No, sir; we never gambled in our lives. If you aint mistaken there, then my name aint Leonidas Swipes,—no, sir; by jingo."

"But how did you get the sheep?" pursued Mr.

Bonfield, for there was something in the rattling loquacity of the Yankee that made him interesting and that caused the male members of the party to gather around him. As the horseman found himself in this pleasing position, he grew more voluble than ever, and declaimed in a style and manner, which demonstrated that while his two companions were mum, yet his party in the aggregate did enough talking to answer very well for one of its size.

"I'm saying it was rather queer, the way we come in possession of them sheep, I swan if it wasn't. We hadn't been in Santa Fe a great while, when a sickly looking Missourian and a gander legged Arkansian came into the town with this drove of sheep. They tried to sell 'em, but nobody would give their price, and one of 'em got out of patience, and turned his horse's head around and started straight back for home. The other staid at the hotel where we was, and got took sick, and I soon seen he was going to die. As I've read law some, I axed him whether he hadn't a will to make, and I'd be happy to draw it up for him. He said he hadn't a single friend in the world, except the Arkansian, and he didn't s'pose he'd ever see him again. He said he hadn't any property except the sheep.

"Well, friends, I was not long in seeing there was a fine opening for a young man, and the way I stuck to that poor Missourian would have teached your hospital nurses a lesson. I hope you don't think there was any selfishness in it; for if any of you get sick, I'll do the same for you. Howsoever, that aint here nor there; the fellow died after awhile, and, in his will, it was found that the five thousand and odd sheep had been left to Leonidas Swipes.

"I was about to sell the drove to a couple of Mexicans, when I happened to hear that sheep in California was worth twenty dollars a piece. Jingo! wasn't there a chance? That flock that I wast just on the point of selling was worth over a hundred thousand

dollars, if I could only get it through the mountains. I tell you the bare idea gives me the head-ache, I swan if I didn't.

"Wal, I told my friends here, Mr. Doolittle and Birchem that if they'd join, each of 'em could have a third, and we'd make our fortune. So we started, and here we are without a sheep to our name."

"How did you expect to get through the mountains?"

"The thing has been done before and can be done again."

"But you did not know the way."

"Oh! we had a guide, but he played us a mean trick. I agreed to give him a hundred sheep for his payment, just as soon as he got us into the Sacramento Valley. We hadn't been out three days, when one night, he give us the slip, taking two or three hundred sheep with him and leaving us to go alone. We felt a little shaky about doing it, but we couldn't do anything else, and so we shoved ahead, and by jingo here you see us, only three sheep of us," and Mr. Swipes' face expanded into a broad smile.

"But you haven't told us how these Comanches got the sheep away from you?" said Fred Wainwright, echoing the curiosity that all the others felt.

"You wish the *modus operandi* I presume, I can soon give it, I swan if I can't. Last night we stopped on a small stream of water, where we knew the grass was so *succulent*,—so *succulent*, that the sheep would stay there all Summer if we'd only let them; and, as we was pretty tired, and hadn't had a good night's sleep since leaving Santa Fe, we made up our minds to take a square night's sleep.

"Well, we did so; and when I awoke this morning, I looked around and seen our sheep about a half mile distant, tearing away like mad, and a party of Indians driving on 'em. Well, if you ever seen three Yankees, you know what the matter was with us. We hopped around there awhile, like a lot of chickens that had

stepped on a hot johny cake, and then we set off after the Indians, shouting to 'em to hold on, while we explained the matter to them; but hang 'em, they only went the harder; and, as our horses was used up, we had to give it up and yumer 'em along like to keep 'em from giving out."

"You have been rather unfortunate," remarked several, feeling really sorry for the unfortunate Yankees.

"Yes, but I hope we can recover 'em agin."

"How?"

"Can't we make a party and pursue them? I'll do the fair thing with any of you that will join us. You see it hardly looks smart to let a hundred thousand dollars stray off in that style."

"I cannot speak for the three hunters here, but it would be bardly prudent for the rest of us to weaken our force by dividing it when we are in such a dangerous portion of the country.—but, I beg pardon, we have forgotten the laws of hospitality. Have you been to dinner?"

"I was about to observe that *we had not*, and we would rather do that just now than anything else we can think of."

CHAPTER VI.

FLORENCE BRANDON.

Loss of property, grief and misfortune is almost always sure to affect the appetite. A hearty vigorous digestion is incompatible with depression of spirits, or sudden paralysis of sorrow.

But Leonidas Swipes was subject to no such weakness, so far as the loss of his magnificent drove of sheep was concerned. How remote the prospect of his recovering a tithe of his property, he was resolved that it should interfere in no way with the meal before him.

Himself and his two companions seated themselves upon the ground, near one of the large baggage wagons, while several of the females occupied themselves with placing their food upon a matting before them.

In the caravan were a couple of fine milk cows which, although they had traveled all the way from the States were in good condition and gave excellent milk. When a large pitcher of the cool delightful liquid was placed before the hungry horsemen, their eyes expanded in amazement; but neither Mr. Dobittle nor Mr. Birchem uttered a syllable, except when Swipes asked them whether it was not splendid, whereupon they replied with a grunt and nod of the head.

"Well, I swan if it doesn't beat all I ever seed or heerd tell on. That's the first drop of decent milk I've tasted since leaving Connecticut," said he, addressing the elderly woman who was acting the part of a

waiter. "We had some in Santa Fe, but it couldn't begin with this."

At this point, Swipes poured out a large cup-full, and slowly drank off its contents, gradually lifting the cup until it was inverted over his face thrown back so far as to be horizontal. In this position, he held it for some time until sure the last drop had descended into his mouth, when he lowered it again with a great sigh and a prolonged—"A——hem!"

"But that is splendid now! *splendid*, by jingo! if it isn't. When I had that up to my mouth, I just shut my eyes, and there! I was back in Connecticut agin, a sitting under the old mulberry tree, at noon, after we have been mowing hay, and was taking our lunch! Ah! I was a boy again."

While the hunters were eating, most of the emigrants were consulting together, making the arrangements for the day's journey, and debating the proposition, the Yankee had made for some of them to join in the pursuit of the thieving Comanches.

Fred Wainwright, feeling somewhat interested in Swipes, sauntered slowly toward him, and took a seat on the ground near the party, while they ate, that he might relieve his depression of spirit somewhat by conversing with the quaint New Englander, who, as has been seen was more disposed to be loquacious than anything else.

"I say Mr.—also Mr—what did you tell me was your name?" remarked the latter, as he suddenly cast his eyes toward the young hunter.

"Wainwright."

"I say, Mr. Wainwright, you belong to them trappers; don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think of my proposition. Fine chance for a spec." said he, speaking rapidly and looking shrewdly. "'Taint often you have such a chance."

"I have no particular feeling about it either way," replied Wainwright. "It is a big loss for you, but

we are bound to this emigrant party, having made an engagement to accompany them through the mountains, and don't believe Lancaster or Harling will join you without the free consent of this party."

"Hang the Comanches!" exclaimed Swipes, as well as he could, with his mouth full of meat, bread and milk; "hang 'em I say, they're up to all kinds of tricks, I understand, but I think they have served us just about the meanest one I ever heerd tell 'ou I swan if they haint. I say, Mr. Wainwright, are you much acquainted with the place over the mountains where you're going?"

"Never have been there in my life."

"Don't say; how in creation then are you going to act as guide; that's what I should like to know?"

"I am not the guide; it is Lancaster; he has been on the mountains several times,"

"O—ah! I understand; then he could tell me all about the country. Have you ever heard him speak of the place?"

"Oh! yes; he has referred to it many times."

"Do you know whether there is a good opening for a talented young man?"

"It isn't likely these emigrants would be traveling there through all this danger, unless there was a prospect of their bettering themselves. But what sort of business do you expect engaging in?"

"Well, anything most; I'm handy at everything; served my time as shoemaker, worked some at tailoring and blacksmithing and on the farm, and taught school in the winter. Say, you now," exclaimed Swipes, with a sudden gleam of eagerness. "What kind of a place would it be to open a select school?"

The young hunter could not forbear a laugh at the simplicity of the question.

"I don't think I could give you much encouragement in that direction. The country is most too young to give much attention to their schools, as yet, but I've no doubt there will be a fine chance in a short

time, for such an institution. I am quite aware there is nothing more beneficial to a new settlement than a church and school."

"Say Mr. Wainwright," said Mr. Swipes, looking up in the face of the young hunter, with no little interest. "You look to me and you talk just as if you've been a school teacher."

"No," laughed Fred, "I never taught school a day in my life."

"You've got larning enough to do so. I swan if you haint! when I hear a man say *taught* for *teached*, and *beneficial*, and all them kind of words, I always set him down as knowing enough to teach school. Perhaps you notice I don't allers speak grammatically and call my words exactly right; but don't let that give you the idea that I havn't got no education. I'm sensible of the mistakes after I make them, and when it's too late to help 'em —— Jingo!"

Le nidas Swipes raised his hands in the most profound amazement, as Florence Brandon suddenly walked around the wagon, came up to where they were sitting, and asked in the most musical of tones. "Is there anything more to which you will be helped?"

The discomfited Yankee for a time was unable to find his tongue. He sat gazing at the picture as one enraptured. His companions now found their tongues, and both replied that they were amply provided and wished for nothing more, whereupon she turned and disappeared.

Poor Fred Wainwright was in a dilemma fully as sore as that of Swipes. He had no thought of the girl until the exclamation of the latter. She hal' e b'y within a few feet of where he was reclining upon the ground, and when Swipes became confused she turned toward the young hunter, and looked in his face with a smile as if she would like to have him join her in the enjoyment of the scene. But Fred's face was as red as a Comanches when he looked up and encountered those soulful eyes.

Ah! those eyes with their deep heavenly blue! had he not looked into them before? Those red lips! had he not heard the sweetest words of his life come from them? and that queenly head; had he not bent over that! But stay! this will never do.

The minute he felt the eye of the young lady fastened upon him he let his own fall to the ground, and had his life depended on it he could not have raised them again. He could feel that his countenance was burning and fiery red, and his heart was thumping as it never thumped before. Indeed he feared that he should really faint unless he could recover himself.

He was enraged at himself for displaying such an unmanly weakness, and by a strong effort of the will he overcame his emotion—not enough to raise his eyes, to catch a glimpse at the hem of her dress as she fittered from sight again.

"Can it be that she suspected me?" he asked himself where she had gone. "No, I think she would not recognize me in this dress. Then my beard conceals my features, so that when I look into a spring, as I am about to drink, I cannot believe that I am the person I was a year ago. And my cap; I would hardly know my own brother in it. I would not have her know me at this time for the world, and I do hope that her look at me raised no suspicion in her mind."

"By jingo!" exclaimed Leonidas Swipes, as soon as he could find tongue to express himself, "isn't she a pieter? If I wan't engaged now, I—ahem! might sail in."

"So you are engaged?" remarked Wainwright, glad to find an excuse for directing the attention from his own awkwardness.

"Yes," replied the Yankee, resuming his eating in a serious matter-of-fact manner. "Yes, I'm fast; and if them Comanches hadn't stolen them sheep, I calcul-

lated being in San Francisco in ten months from now, to take passage in the steamer for him, and to buy Deacon Poplair's farm and settle down with Araminty—but hangnation, the sheep are gone, and where's the use of talking?"

And as if to draw his griefs clean out of his remembrance, he ate more ravenously than ever.

But all that is temporal must have an end, and so did the enormous meal of the three half-famished sheep dealers. When they had finally gorged themselves, and were remounted on their animals, they by no means were the woebegone-looking wretches that might have been imagined, in those who had just seen a hundred thousand dollars slip and escape off on the prairies. On the contrary they seemed quite cheerful. Messrs. Doolittle and Birchem were silent, as a matter of course, but Leonidas looked greasy and rather jovial.

As soon as the meal was concluded and the march was resumed, the train heading a little toward the north west, as Leonidas remarked they were some distance north of the pass by which they hoped to make their way through the mountains into Lower California, which in reality was Southern California, a considerable ways north of the Gulf, and not the peninsula known by that name.

Leonidas Swipes was informed by the trappers that they truly sympathized with the loss borne by him and his friends, but their engagement with Mr. Bonefield and the leaders of the train forbade them to unite with them in the attempt to secure the sheep. In fact, the trapper informed them that it was useless for them to expect to regain their property. It would require but a short time for the Comanches to reach one of their villages, where they could marshal a hundred warriors with which to defend their property; and mounted on their swift mustangs, it was almost impossible to compete with them.

It was a hard dose to swallow, but Swipes took it

philosophically, and persisted in believing there was some hope of recovering them. At least, as the Comanches took the same direction that the train was following, he concluded to remain with the latter for the present.

CHAPTER VII.

FORT MIFFLIN INSTITUTE.

Until the great Pacific Railroad is completed, traveling across the plains must always be a wearisome labor. The rapid staging between many of the distant points, has in a measure toned down this laborious monotony ; but, even with this improvement, hundreds who have made the trip will testify to its wearying sameness.

But, when an emigrant train starts forth it is the very impersonation of monotony to an impatient spirit. For a time the variety of landscape occupies the mind and in a great degree relieves the tedium ; but, although some of the finest scenery in the world is in the West, it soon loses its power to amuse, and all feelings are absorbed in those of apprehension regarding dangers and anxiety to get ahead—manifested in some by a figuring and calculation as to the number of suns that must yet rise and set before they can hope to see their destination ; in others to hurry and make the best time possible, and in still others by a dogged resolve to plod along without noting the distance traveled, but with the intention of suddenly awaking to the fact that they have completed their journey, and their travels are at an end. The only objection to carrying out this whim, is that he who undertakes it, is sure to find himself in spite of all he can do to divert his mind, looking for the *denouement* long before it is due.

The emigrant train, which from this time forth

must occupy a prominent part in our narrative, was one of those that have plodded patiently all the way from the Mississippi, until now having passed three-fourths of the distance, it was on the very border of the wild regions of California.

On the whole they had experienced good fortune. They had not lost an animal or a member of the party since starting, excepting their guide who was slain in the manner already narrated. Not a man, woman or child had seen an hour's sickness, and all were now in the best of spirits.

But they had encountered more hardships than they anticipated, and on this day instead of having such a stretch of wild wilderness before them, it was their confident expectation to be at Fort Mifflin. They had terrible times in crossing some of the swift rivers; their horses had been carried away, and many a precious hour had been spent in recovering them; ten of their wagons had been hopelessly mired, and a large portion of their most valuable goods had been whirled away by the rushing torrents.

Then storms, whose fierceness they had never seen equalled in their own home, had swept over the prairie, causing them to tremble for their very lives—but here at last they all were, secure, intact, with a skilful guide at their head. So had they not every reason to be thankful, to take courage and to press on?

Ward Lancaster appreciating the magnitude of his charge, rode some distance at the head of the train, his eye constantly sweeping the prairie, and his mind taken up with the duty before him. He rode alone, except when some of his friends chose to keep company with him; but these generally found him as morose and incommunicative, that they were glad to fall back again and join the more sociable portion.

The horsemen were scattered all through the train, so that in case of attack they could rally to the defence of any portion without unnecessary delay. As natu-

rally was to be expected, intimate friends and acquaintances found their way into each other's society,

· Warfield and Mr. Bonfield appeared to take a strong liking to each other, for they rode side by side, and chatted in the most pleasant and familiar manner. Little was seen of Florence Brandon. Occasionally she indulged in a few miles walk, but at other times she was in one of the large lumbering covered wagons with Mrs. Bonfield and a maiden aunt. Miss Jamison, whose loquacity equalled that of Leonidas Swipes, and whose bosom seemed incapable of any emotion except that of the importance of keeping her sharp eye and long nose turned toward her ward.

Messrs. Doolittle and Bircham rode side by side; and as neither was heard to utter a syllable to the other, there can be but little doubt but that they vastly enjoyed themselves.

Swipes was getting along handsomely. He appeared to have recovered his spirits entirely, and to have forgotten the brief time he enjoyed the bliss of expected wealth.

"I tell you Mr. Wainwright," said he, as he rode beside him, shaking his head and gesticulating his long arms, "I've *an idee*."

"Ah!"

"Yes; it come into my head as I was riding along. I tell you it is an idee *that is an idee*—bound to make my fortune."

"As sure as the sheep would have done had they remained in your possession?"

"Yes s; but perhaps not quite so fast; but in a much better manner; in a manner that shall make my name famous along the Pacific coast."

"It must be quite a grand scheme that has entered your head."

"It *is!*" was the emphatic response. "One of those idees such as you don't get more than once in a life time."

"Do you wish me to share your knowledge of it?"

"Of course I was preparing your mind for it like, What do you think of the Fort Mifflin Institute for the education of youths of both sexes?"

"That certainly sounds well."

"And aint it well—isn't it grand? And what do you think of it?"

"You will have to be a little more explicit in your statements, before I can give you any decided opinion."

"Why, as soon as we get to Fort Mifflin I shall erect a building, to be called the Fort Mifflin Institute for the Education of the Youths of both sexes. I shall have a lot of circulars printed."

"Where will you get them printed?"

"At Fort Mifflin, of course. I believe in supporting home industry; I swun it a't!"

Wainwright laughed.

"There is no printing office within a hundred miles of Fort Mifflin."

"Whew! is that so? That'll make some trouble—not much, however,—I can run up to San Francisco or to Sacramento city; have a few thousand circulars printed and distribute them on my way coming back Jingo! its good I'll have to go so far, don't you see?"

"Where will you obtain your pupils?"

"From every part of California! Fact is, I should not wonder, after the Institute becomes known thro' the Atlantic States, I should draw quite a number from there. You see, Mr. Wainwright, I've *tache'd* before, and I've got a reputation up in Connecticut. What do you think of it, Mr. Wainwright?"

"Perhaps you will succeed—hardly as well though as you seem to anticipate. I presume you would run the institution yourself."

"I shall be the head of course—the principal; but I shall organize a faculty at once. Mr. Doolittle there will be just the man to be professor of mathematics, and Mr. Birchem professor of the natural sciences."

"Can you get them to do enough talking to fill their positions?"

"Plenty, plenty. Fact is, Mr. Wainwright, teachers do too much talking altogether. They're just the men for the position, I swan if they aint."

"And yours'f?"

"Professor of Belles Letters, modern languages, &c. I've got another idee!"

And totally unable to control himself Mr. Swipes boiled over, laughed, gave utterance to several strange squeaking screams, which drew all eyes toward him, and wound up by declaring,

"It is a grand idea—*grand!* oh! so grand!"

"Pray let's hear it, and don't make quite such an excitement!" said the young hunter, feeling some embarrassment at the attention which was being drawn in his direction.

"It is grand—a grand idea, worth forty thousand droves of such sheep as I lost; bound to make Professor Swipes and the Fort Mifflin Institute for the Education of the Youths of Both Sexes famous from one end of the country to the other. What do you think of the idea, Mr. Wainwright?"

"I can tell better when I know what it is."

"At the head of the ladies' department, I will place, whom do you 'spose?"

"Araminta, your beloved in Connecticut."

"N--no! was the somewhat hesitating response. I propose to place Miss Florence Brandon! Aint that grand?"

"You mean the young lady who is a member of this party?"

"Certainly; who else could there be?"

"But you must remember, my good friend, that the consent of herself and father is to be gained in this matter, before you would be warranted in publishing her as the head of your department for the instruction of young ladies."

"Her consent," repeated Swipes with the greatest

amazement. "Why—why she'll be crazy at the chance? You won't be able to hold her, when she knows what a grand opening it will be for her."

Fred Wainwright shook his head.

"Begin modestly, Mr. Swipes; begin modestly; establish your school, get it in thorough operation, and then look about you for a female assistant. Why not send for your Araminta?"

"Well, you see, she isn't quite so pretty as this Miss Brandon, and I've thought of having Miss Brandon's likeness published and distributed with the circulars.

I think it would help. I will mention the matter to her the first chance."

"Take my advice and don't do it; it will do no good."

"You speak as if you knowed her."

"I—I know how any modest woman would act under such circumstances."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the stoppage of the emigrant train, near a small stream of water, and it was observed that Lancaster was talking quite earnestly with the male members who were gathered around him. Riding forward the young hunter and Yankee heard him.

"I don't want to scare you but there's a good sized war party of Apaches in the hills yonder and they'n been following us all the afternoon, and we'll see more of 'em pretty soon."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN APACHE COURTSHIP.

The trapper pointed toward a pile of wooded hills, in which direction every eye was immediately drawn, without discovering, however, the 'signs' to which he alluded.

"They're there," he added, "and I've had a half a dozen glimpses of 'em since we started. It won't be long before you all see 'em."

In confirmation of the hunter's words, at this moment a couple of mounted Indians were seen to come forth from the wood and undergrowth, ride to the bottom of the hill, where they halted as if waiting for something. The next moment a half a dozen followed them until ten were gathered together upon their gaudily-caparisoned mustangs.

The next moment, they commenced riding at an easy gallop toward the expectant train.

"By jingo! they're going to tackle us!" exclaimed Leonidas Swipes in considerable excitement, and with the hope of alarming those around him.

"Hardly," replied Fred, "Apaches, don't do things in that style; they generally take the night time and steal upon their enemies unawares."

"But what does it all mean?

"Such an approach in broad day generally means peace."

"But—but—" persisted Swipes, as if unable to comprehend what it all meant; "the Apaches are not on friendly terms with us."

"When it suits their purpose it may be so."

The emigrants understood, as a matter of course, that the approach of the redskins meant nothing hostile, although more than one of them quietly examined his rifle to make sure it was loaded and ready for instant use.

A few moments later, the war party came to a dead halt about a hundred yards distant, and the leader or chief made a gesture of friendship, which was answered in pantomimes by Lancaster, who muttered at the same time to those near him.

"Two of them dogs is Comanches."

"Wonder if they aint the ones that stole my sheep!" exclaimed Leonidas, sagely.

The preliminaries being arranged the chief now rode forward, his warriors following at a distance of a dozen yards or so. The emigrants reassured them by signs that they were welcome, whereupon the whole ten slid lightly from their horses, and, leaving them stand without any fastening or guardianship, came forward, until it may be said, they mingled in with the whites, at which point they laid their arms upon the ground, and waited for their white friends to do the same.

"Put down your guns," said the trapper, "that's what they're waiting for, but if you can hang on to your pistols at the same time without their noticing you, why I haint any 'bjection."

"I swan, if I let go of my revolver," muttered Swipes, as he shoved the weapon as far as possible down his pantaloons pocket.

The Apaches now came forward, and seated themselves upon the ground, placing themselves in a semi-circle, while the circle was completed by a dozen of the emigrants, including the hunters, Swipes taking good care to occupy the centre of the Caucasian line, so as to be as far away as possible from the American.

At this juncture, Mr. Bonfield whispered to Lancas-

ter, who was sitting next to him, that the chief or leader was the same fellow who had visited their camp alone, about a week before. He was now painted and bedaubed, with the evident intention of concealing his identity, but Mr. Bonfield was sure he recognized him. When finally he opened his mouth, and spoke, the last atom of doubt was removed.

Lancaster nodded his head to signify that he understood what it all meant.

At this point, the chief uttered an exclamation, spoke several words, and lit a large ornamented pipe. The trapper immediately replied.

"Can you understand him?" inquired Mr. Bonfield.

"Yes; he speaks the Apache tongue."

"What did he say?"

"He announced himself as Cherouka, mighty chief of the Apaches, and that he was our friend, which you know is the thunderingest lie ever told."

Cherouka took a few whiffs at the pipe, passed it to his neighbor, who imitated him, and in this manner it passed the entire circuit, including the white men. This was an official declaration of friendship, but it deceived no one.

The way being now opened, Cherouka recognizing Lancaster, as his "man," addressed his words to him, while the trapper responded promptly and unmistakably. The language, as a matter of course was all "Greek" to the emigrants, who could only gain a knowledge of its meaning, when their guide chose to enlighten them.

The first remark of the Apache was a repetition of his friendship, and his best wishes for the safe advance of the party "toward the setting sun." This was "chaff" and was so understood by him who comprehended the words, who replied in the usual diplomatic manner, returning the hypocritical professions, and seeking to draw the real meaning from the crafty Apache.

But it seemed impossible to get any word from

Cherouka, explanatory of his true object in thus visiting a camp of people, between whom and his own kindred it was generally understood, the most implacable enmity existed. This fact convinced the shrewd guide, that the whole thing was a ruse to cover some hidden design.

As Lancaster looked the painted redskin in the face his own wits were busy, and his keen eyes constantly wandered hither, and to make sure that he should not be surprised by any sudden *coup-d'état* of the enemy. Finally the presence of the two Comanches in the party, gave him as he believed the correct clew.

Undoubtedly these two gentlemen were concerned in the theft of Leonidas Swipe's sheep; and, fully impressed with the value of their prize, they were resorting to every means to delay pursuit. They had known or suspected of the union of the unfortunate sheep dealers, with emigrants, and fearful that they might thus organize a vigorous and dangerous campaign against them, they had adopted this artifice of keeping them and their friends off the scent, until the plunder was beyond their reach.

Five thousand and odd sheep are not a very mobile organization in a precipitous country; and if any one thinks they are, we advise him to try the experiment and undeceive himself.

Consequently the Comanches only displayed ordinary sagacity in attempting the stratagem to which we have referred.

"All well, if it's no more," was the reflection of the trapper, as these thoughts passed through his mind. "but these dusky scamps may have something behind all this."

As the interview progressed, the emigrants gradually gathered around the parties. The curiosity, naturally enough affected the women; and, when they saw the Indians, in their war-paint and war-dress seated upon the ground, gravely chaffering with the

whites, they too approached until they were within a few feet of the parties.

As Fred Wainwright sat looking upon the face of the Apache chief, during the interview, he noticed that he kept gazing to his left as though something in that direction attracted his attention. His looks became so fixed at last, that he turned his head, and then discovered that the all absorbing object which had caught the dusky scamp's eye was no less a personage than Miss Florence Brandon, who, occupied in the scene itself was unconscious of the attention which she had attracted.

"By jingo! he's smitten!" whispered Swipes to the young hunter.

"The old dog is struck with her," was the reply, "and if we aint careful, there'll trouble come from this. Just watch him!"

"I never shall give my consent to his taking Miss Brandon away; you see it would be a severe loss for the Fort Mifflin Institute."

"Keep your mouth shut and your eyes open," was the somewhat strong hint that Mr. Swipes received to remain quiet during the progress of the interview. He looked at the young hunter a moment as if he were about to resent this insult to his dignity; but he finally concluded to remain silent and look on.

Cherouka hadn't sense enough to conceal his admiration of Miss Brandon or he didn't care if it was observed. Fixing his sharp black eye upon the girl, he suddenly arose to his feet and walked toward her. Alarmed at the movement, she started back with a slight exclamation, and the Apache chief found his progress suddenly checked by Fred Wainwright the young hunter, who strode across his path and waved him back.

This occurrence created some little excitement, and for a moment threatened serious consequences. The brow of the chief darkened and he placed his hand upon his knife handle; but, his second thought evidently

prevailed, and he sank back again, addressing Lancaster the interpreter. The latter laughed,

"What do you s'pose he says?" he asked turning to his friends.

No one could possibly imagine.

"He says he loves that gal, begging her parlor, hating and he wants her to go to his wigwam with him."

This caused a smile, but, as it was plain that the chief was in earnest, all felt the propriety of hearing his ridiculous passion, as if it were entitled to serious consideration. Lancaster was therefore directed to inform the dusky dog that his compliment was duly appreciated, but that the "White Plume" could not accept his offer.

This being duly communicated to Cherouka served only to make him eager to secure the coy prize. He instantly offered a large belt of wampum and two horses for her. This was courteously but firmly refused as before, whereupon he made still more extravagant offers.

These meeting with the same fate as the others, he demanded the reasons why his offers were refused.

"What shall I tell him?" asked Lancaster, looking at the blushing girl. "Hanged if I know what excuse to give him."

"Tell him she's engaged!" called out Swipes in a husky whisper.

"Shall I tell him you've got another feller?" asked the trapper, with all the simplicity imaginable.

"No; tell him no such thing for I have not!"

Little did Florence Brandon dream of the vast happiness produced by that declaration in the breast of a certain young hunter standing near her, with his eyes fixed upon her face with almost the keen eagerness of the Apache lover himself.

The latter was made to believe, at length there was no hope for his suit; and mounting his horse, he and his followers rode away sullen, lowering and vengeful, while the whites breathed freer, when the troublesome visitors were fairly out of the range of the camp.

CHAPTER IX.

AN AUDACIOUS PROCEEDING.

When the Indians, including the lover-like Apache were fairly beyond hearing of the emigrants, they ventured to indulge fully in their mirth.

There was something so inexpressibly ridiculous in the facts of this courtship, which could only find expression of laughter. None enjoyed it more than the fair one concerned; she considered it the greatest adventure of her life, and never wearied of listening to all its particulars, from those who had taken a closer observation of Cherouka's actions than she had.

But after all there was a serious side to this matter,—at least the trappers concluded there was. They understood perfectly well the treacherous nature of these redskins, were certain that this chief would neglect no means of securing the prize which had been so decidedly refused him.

Believing it inadvisable to alarm their friends, they discussed the matter among themselves. The conclusion was that all three should stand guard that evening; and that through the day, one or two of them at least should keep unremitting watch.

When the suppers were eaten, several of the leaders of the emigrant train were acquainted with the facts of the case, while the others believed that only a prudential course was taken to guard against the thieving propensities of the redskins.

Fred Wainwright took his station near the wagon which contained the sleeping Florence Bradon, and to

him no occupation could have been more delightful than thus to watch by the side of her whom he loved,—yes, madly loved: he confessed it, standing there alone in the gloom of the night. This girl, who little imagined that Fred Wainwright was not Fred Wainwright—but——ah! well, perhaps the past was to be a dream and perhaps not. At any rate his duty just there was to stand guard over the fair being who occupied his waking and sleeping thoughts to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Not a minute's sleep visited the eyes of the Trappers of the Gila, through that same summer night. They passed from point to point, continually moving through the train, among the wagons, and once or twice, one or two of them passed out upon the prairie and scrutinized every point visible.

The night was semi-dark,—a faint moon rising high in the sky, now and then obscured by the passing clouds. Occasionally the vision was able to penetrate for several hundred yards, and then it was restricted to a fifth of that distance.

Leonidas Swipes had scented the danger, and declared that he would also keep guard during the night; for he could not consent to run any risk of losing the intended head of the female department of the Fort Mifflin Institute. He averred that his sense of hearing was so acute that he could instantly detect the approach of any creature,—no matter if it was a weasel, or the tiny serpent that sometimes moves among the grass.

Mr. Swipes took his position just in the rear of the large white-covered waggon in which Florence Brandon was sleeping, all unconscious of the faithful guardianship which was kept over her. Here he leaned against the heavy rear wheel, and gave himself up to cogitation.

The young hunter, toward the middle of the night, made a circuit of the encampment; and, as he came back, observed the figure of the man leaving against

the wagon, and concluded to test the extreme watchfulness of which he had boasted. Walking rather lightly, therefore, he approached him from behind, and, finding he attracted no attention, he stepped more heavily until he was making more than usual noise. Still the vigilant sentinel did not turn his head, and Fred noticed that he was muttering something to himself.

¶ "No doubt she'll be just the ticket, I swan if she wo'nt; but to wake her now, or to wait till morning is the question. I'd have a better chance to talk it over with her, and by jingo! I've a good notion to give the wagon a rattle so as to wake her up——INJINS! INJINS!"

At that instant, the heavy hand of the young hunter grasped the Yankee's shoulder, and, fully assured that he was in the power of the dreaded Cherouka, he sprang several feet from the ground, and shouted at the top of his voice; but, confronting Wainwright, and immediately comprehending his mistake, added in fully as loud a tone,

"No INJINS! No INJINS! I WAS MISTAKEN! Jingo! what's the use of scaring a fellow that way?" he demanded, still shivering from the shock he had received.

"I didn't know you were so easily frightened."

"But you come on a feller so sudden like,—didn't give me time to collect my presence of mind."

"That is about the style that a redskin would have approached yon, except that instead of his hand, he would have brought down his tomahawk on your head."

"You don't say so! I s'pose he would, but then I wouldn't 've let him come in that style. I'd 've foun' him mighty hard."

"Didu't you tell me, you would detect the approach of an Indian, no matter how stealthy he came up to you?"

"Well, so I would."

"Why didn't you hear me?"

"You didn't come up like an Indian, as you say yourself."

"I know that; I made twice as much noise."

"That is just the reason I didn't notice you; if you had come up natural like,—that is as one of your genuine redmen always do, I'd 've heard you, you may be sure."

"And what would have been the consequence?"

"I would have whipped round with the quickness of lightning, if not a little quicker, and blowed the audacious redskin to blue blazes, before he would have known anything or could have said Jack Robinson."

At this juncture, a figure suddenly appeared among them, which quickly resolved itself into Ward Lancaster, their guide.

"What's all this hubub about?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Lancaster, nothing at all," replied Swipes.

"But if I ain't powerful mistaken, I heern some one yell out that the Injins were coming."

Thus fairly detected, the Yankee was compelled to acknowledge the truth, and receiving a warning from the trapper to "put a stopper in his meat-trap," the guide sauntered away to his own post of observation where he remained until the break of day.

Finally morning came, and with it the pleasant fact that nothing had been seen or heard of a single redskin since the departure of the party the evening before. This was a pleasant fact we say, and was a great relief to the trappers, who had concluded to a certainty that there would be trouble before the night passed.

As soon as it was fairly light Lancaster and Harling rode out on the prairie and took a survey of the surrounding country to look for signs of their enemies. They scrutinized the hills closely, but with the same result,—nothing was seen or heard regarding them.

"We'll keep a sharp look-out for the warmints to-

day, and if we don't see nothin' of 'em, why it'll knide look as though they didn't intend to trouble us."

"Your fear, I suppose, is that Cherouka became so desperately enamored with the young lady we have in our charge that he may try to take her away from us against our will."

"Injins are queer critters," replied the guide, "and it's just like 'em to try some such a trick. I've known of such things before."

"That fellow was desperately smitten, wasn't he?"

"Yes," drawled the trapper, "but not much more than another person we've got with us."

"Who is that?" demanded Fred innocently.

"Him as riding alongside of me on his horse. They call him Fred Wainwright I b'lieve; and, if I amt powerful mistaken, the gal has took quite a shine to him."

The poor young hunter, almost sank from his beast. He never dreamed for an instant that any one suspected his secret, and he now feared that it had been discovered by all.

"Shoot me, you're red in the face as a b'iled lobster," laughed the guide perfectly merciless. "It's plain enough you're gone any way. Wal, she's a pretty critter to look at and to have take a hawkerin' for a feller."

"Do you think she has noticed me,—that is—that is—"

"Loves you, why don't you say?"

"Well, yes, if you please."

"Can't say that. When you stepped in atween the Apache and her, all so sassy and bold, I could see plain enough she rather liked your way of doing things. I think everything is plain sailing for you."

There was a vast deal of comfort in the words of the honest hearted trapper, and the young hunter reflected upon them many a time through the day. They stirred old emotions in his breast, and nothing that could have been said by any one—always excepting the fair

Florence herself—could have been more prized or imparted a greater degree of pleasure.

The journey of the train was resumed, and progresed through the day without any incident worthy of record. The character of the country changed, becoming more rugged and precipitous and they came in sight of several snow-covered peaks, towering against the blue sky beyond, like masses of white clouds. Now and then, too, a breeze of wind—chilling and penetrating swept over them, bringing the climate of these icy regions with it.

Mr. Swipes introduced himself to Miss Brandon during the afternoon, and regaled her for over an hour with his plans for the successful establishment of the Fort Mifflin Institute, greatly to her edification and amusement. She listened patiently to him, and then, as in duty bound, referred him to "papa," with which the enthusiastic educator was compelled to content himself for the time being.

A sharp vigilance was maintained during the entire day; but nothing was seen of wild Indians although there was any abundance of wild animals. This fact led the trappers to the hope and half belief that they would suffer no further molestation from Cherouka and his party at least.

The encampment at night was in a small beautiful grove, on the banks of a tiny stream of icy cold water, where abundance of the best of fodder was found. Everything was arranged with the usual care, and, as the trappers were considerably wearied, Lancaster and Wainwright concluded to obtain a good night's rest, while the opportunity was given them. There was no saying when a like chance would occur.

Huling remained up, taking a general oversight of the sentinels, while Swipes, as before placed himself in the vicinity of the wagon, containing the precious person of her whom he intended should help him make a fame and fortune in the State of the Golden Gate!

He affirmed that she could not be safe unless he were in the immediate vicinity.

It was far beyond midnight, and Leonidas Swipes was soundly sleeping, when a shadow emerged from the darkness that surrounded the grove, and stole as noiselessly forward as a phantom. Straight toward the wagon it glided. Sh! it pauses and glares around in the darkness; the sentinel is soundly sleeping—now it enters the rear of the wagon; there is a slight sound but not enough to wake the dilatory sleeper—the next moment he reappears bearing a form in his arms, with his broad hand pressed over his mouth,—with the same absolute silence it steals through the encampment and the next moment Cherouka, the Apache chieftain has vanished and with him Florence Brandon.

CHAPTER X.

PREPARING FOR THE PURSUIT.

Just as day was breaking over prairie and mountain, a succession of ear-splitting shrieks issued from the wagon in which Miss Sillingsby had passed the night. They were so terrific and rapid that in a few minutes the whole camp was active, and the people hurrying toward the poor lady, and anxiously inquiring the cause of her alarming terror.

"Oh! Florence! Florence! Florence! I shall die! I shall die! Oh! what will Mr. Brandon say! I wish I was dead! I wish I was dead!"

It was a long time before she could be quieted, and then the dreadful truth became known. Florence Brandon was missing!

With the first shriek of Miss Sillingsby, a suspicion of what had occurred flashed through the minds of Lancaster and Wainwright with the instantaneousness of an electric thrill. They were sleeping together near one of the large camp fires, and they instantly sprang to their feet; but, instead of running to the wagon toward the shrieker, they hurried outside the encampment and the grove, and gazed around in search of some evidence of this excessive fright. It is scarcely necessary to say that they discovered nothing at all.

"Maybe it isn't as bad as we imagine!" said the young hunter, addressing his elder companion, for the first time since they had risen from their sleep. "It may not be *that*."

Lancaster shook his head.

"I've been a fool to go to sleep ; we've been outwitted by that infernal Apache. I feel it in my bones. He has stolen in on her while we were asleep and walked off with that critter."

"But let us find out the truth from Miss Sillingsby."

"I suppose we may as well, 'thongh I know what it is," muttered the trapper, as he sullenly complied with the request.

Miss Sillingsby, in answer to the clamorous demands made upon her, finally let the truth ooze out. Near the middle of the night, as she imagined, she dreamed of seeing a terrible Indian crawl into the back part of the wagon and carry off her ward. It was so dark that she could only catch a glimpse of him as he came in and went out.

She woke up with a conviction that her dream was true ; and now that she was awake long enough, she was satisfied that it was no dream at all, but an actual occurrence that had taken place before her eyes. Hence her excitement.

Then did the cheeks of the females blanch with terror. Florence Brandon spirited away in the night by an Apache Indian ! The very thought was enough to fill one with shuddering terror.

"Yes, she is gone," exclaimed Miss Sillingsby, wringing her hands and threatening to go into hysterics again. "She is gone, and what is to become of me and her poor father ?"

"Yes, by jingo!" wailed Leonidas Swipes, darting hither and thither and fairly dancing in excitement to the tune of the lamentations around him. "What's to become of the Fort Mission Institute for the Education of the Youths of Both Sexes? Gone up, and my hopes and fortunes dashed to the ground ; jest as they always get dashed when they are about to bud and blossom ; I swan if they don't."

"See here, my man," called out Fred Wainwright, "you acted as sentinel last night—didn't you?"

"I believe—come to think, I am almost sure I did."

"And you took this wagon of Miss Brandon's under your special charge, as you were satisfied that was the only way of making her safe; you did this, didn't you?"

"I believe—come to think I s'pect I did do something like that."

"Then what kind of a sentinel are you?" demanded the young hunter, contemptuously, "to allow an Indian to come in here at night and steal her away."

"By jingo, I don't understand it; I swan if I do; I must have been—ah—have heen—"

"Asleep of course."

"No, no, oh no; I was abstracted at the time—absorbed in the investigation of some great truth which made me oblivious, as it were, to what else was going on around me."

By this time the first fever of excitement was over, and the people began to converse rationally upon the all-absorbing subject, while the trappers occupied themselves in searching through the camp for some evidence of the direction taken by the audacious Apache with his prize.

When it was stated that the entire grove had been traversed back and forth by the men and animals, it will be seen that this was about impossible, even when all three of the keen-eyed hunters set themselves to work at the task, passing back and forth and scrutinizing every foot of ground.

But upon the outside of the encampment, beyond the range of the travel by the whites, Lancaster detected the print of a mocassin in the dusty earth. He followed it for twenty yards out upon the prairie, and then looking up, saw that it led directly toward a clump of trees about a quarter of a mile distant, and along the branches of the creek on which they were

encamped—the stream making a sharp bend just above where the train halted.

"We'll find something there," said the old hunter, pointing toward the tree, "the snip has made for that point."

"And left it as soon as he reached it."

"I s'poseso; but he wouldn't have gone there, if it wasn't for something particular. Let's go and see."

The hunter hurried over the prairie, and in a few minutes reached the trees. Here, upon looking down at the ground, they were rewarded with another sight of the trail, proving the correctness of the conclusion at which Lancaster had jumped.

"And we'll soon see what it all means," he said, as passed in among the trees.

It required but a moment indeed; a sudden "Ah!" was heard from the old hunter and he pointed down to the ground.

"Do you see that?"

"Horse tracks, I believe."

"Yes, that tells the whole story; the scamp had his horse fastened among the trees, and has toted the gal here as fast as he could travel, mounted his critter and then put."

"Shall we follow any further?"

"No; I don't see as there is any use just now, as we haint got our horses; we'll go back to camp and let 'em know what we've learned."

Fred Wainwright all this time was in a fever of excitement, although he had made superhuman efforts to conceal it from his practical companion thus far; but he began to be seriously alarmed at the coolness and indifference which he manifested.

"Ward," said he, endeavoring to speak in a matter-of-fact tone, "we're going to follow these scamps, are we not?"

"I'll promise you they'll get such a chase as they uever dreamed of; but you know euough to under-

stand it's going to be work and not play. That Apache having got his hands upon the gal, won't let her go in a hurry."

" You know the Apaches are an ugly set of people. How do you suppose they will treat her?"

" Just as the folks out east would treat General Washington's mother, if she was alive and should go through the country. Cherouka wants to make her his squaw, and the old fool will try and win her love by kindness. No ; we may take a week to capture her in and bring her back just as unharmed and free from insult as she was before she heard of Cherouka."

" O heavens ! Ward, you cannot imagine how much you have relieved me."

" I seed you was kinder worked over it," though you'ne been trying mighty hard to keep it from me," replied Lancaster with a sly grin.

" Of course ; who is there in our whole party that doesn't feel terrible over it?"

" Y—a—s, I know, but I reckon you feel a little terribler than the rest."

" I don't know as I do."

" But I do though ; don't try to play any of your foriniky tricks on me, Fred ; I'm an old enough coon to know what it all means."

" If that is the case where is the use of any reference being made to it, by either you or me ?" asked Wainwright.

Lancaster and Wainwright made their way back to camp, where they had found the excitement among the females had increased, while upon the men it had settled into a determination, that if it were possible for mortal man to rescue the fair captive, it should be done. Not a man among them all but was ready and anxious to join in the pursuit.

Time was precious, the guide, who from his position, naturally fell into that of a guide in other matters, determined to organize the pursuit at once. It would be madness to think of allowing all the men of

a majority to undertake the business, as the train was in a dangerous part of the country, and such a proceeding would invite their destruction by the thieving hordes who would be very quick to discover their defenseless condition, and take advantage of it.

Ten men well mounted and armed were all he needed, and he selected these at once. It is hardly necessary to say that himself and Wainwright were the first two. Harling, it was concluded best, to leave with the train, where his knowledge and watchfulness would detect the very first opinion. Mr. Templeton and seven others, whose appearance struck the trapper as being favorable, were then selected—he expressing the belief that each of them possessed the requisite amount of “grit” for the business before them.

Leonidas Swipes insisted that he should accompany the expedition. It may have been that he felt an obligation in the matter, thus to seek to repair, in so far as possible, his shame or rather remissness as a sentinel; or, it may be, that his shrewd mind saw a slight opportunity of gaining some knowledge of the five thousand and odd sheep which had been so unceremoniously taken from him.

But Lancaster would not count him as an effective man, and as it came about that the Yankee made the eleventh or odd man, a matter which created much merriment, but no ill will upon the individual concerned.

Mr. Bonfield remained with the emigrant train. At the advice of the guide he agreed to throw up some temporary fortifications, to insure safety in case of attack. It was not at all improbable that the eleven men would be seen as they rode away, by the sharp eye of some prowling Indians, who might deem the occasion just the one, in which to make an attack on the remaining ones in the hope of securing plunder, and perhaps destroying the whole party. The loss of their animals would be an irreparable one just as they

were entering that mighty wall of rocks and chasms which separate California from the territories, where every ounce of their animal strength would be needed.

Mr. Bonfield's intention was to make a sort of "outer wall" to inclose the entire encampment, and from behind which, in case of attack, he and his men could rain their bullets upon the redskins, without fear of return.

The eleven men were mounted on the fleetest and best animals that could be selected from the party, and the sun was hardly above the horizon, when they rode forth in their attempt to rescue Miss Florence Brandon from the hands of Cherouka, the Apache chief.

CHAPTER XL

PURSUIT.

Fairly outside of the encampment, the little party of hunters struck wide a sweeping gallop toward the hills where Lancaster had discovered the evidence of Cherouka's having mounted his horse and fled. Here he made another examination of the ground, when he discovered the direction the trail took, his manner showed that it was precisely what he anticipated and desired.

"Do you see that grove yonder?" he asked of his men, pointing toward a clump of trees about a mile distant. As a matter of course all replied in the affirmative.

"Wal, now, we'll just not notice the trail and strike a bee line for them trees. If we find the trail there, and p'raps a few other horse's feet, there it is all right and I know just where to look for the Apaches."

As he spoke he again loosed his rein, and the whole eleven went galloping almost in a compact body across the country, toward the grove which had been indicated. In doing so, all of those who were capable of doing so, observed that they left the trail, in taking another course. They, and among them was our hero, the young hunter, looked upon this proceeding with strong misgivings as to its prudence. It was a comparatively easy matter to follow the footprints of the horses over the open plain, and this leaving it for a doubtful matter, looked like a waste of precious time.

However, Ward Lancaster was the leader of the expedition, and he was the last one who should attempt to gainsay any command of his.

A few minutes brisk ride brought them to the grove in question ; and on the very edge of the timber, the eyes of all were gladdened by a sight of fresh tracks of horses.

"What I expected," remarked Lancaster, as his grey eyes sparkled with pleasure. "The rest of the dogs waited him."

"How many of them?"

"Only a half dozen; don't you see where their horses have gnawed the bark off the trees? Six of 'em."

"I swan we ought to be able to manage *them*, without difficulty," remarked Swipes. "Just foller 'em up, sail in a dash around : that's my advice."

"It wouldn't do," replied Fred with a shake of the head, while Lancaster did not deem it worth while to notice the Yankee's ignorance.

"Why not? I tell you, my friend, that's just the thing, and jingo, I claim the credit of originating that'er idea. Like all of mine it's rather hefty."

"It is about the most foolish plan that could be proposed," said Fred, a little anxious to take some of the conceit out of the fellow, "and is the one which would be sure to be the death of the girl, we hope to rescue."

"What's that?" he demanded in amazement.

"It is the quickest plan that could be devised to ensnre Miss Bradon's death."

"Show me how," added Swipes, with the air of a man who had proposed an unsolvable puzzle. "Demonstrate that as we say in geometry."

"Suppose now that we should catch sight of this party of Apaches, out on the prairie, and should dash away after them at the top of our speed. There are six of them and eleven of us: what do you suppose would happen?"

"They'd drop the lady like a hot potatoe, or else

put her in a safe position and then turn round and fight us."

The young hunter laughed.

"Neither; they would see that there was no chance of getting the girl away, when they would tomahawk her, leave her dead on the plain, and then do their best to take care of themselves."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Swipes, perfectly aghast, "that would never do! Tell Mr. Lancaster, I recall that advice, and do not risk him to follow it out."

"There is no necessity of going to that trouble."

"Yes; why not?"

"Because there is no danger of his following it; he knows too much; and, Mr. Swipes, you will allow me to suggest that it looks rather out of place for you or me, who never saw a prairie, except a short time ago, to attempt to advise a man who hunted upon them before either of us were born."

Leonidas could only stare his surprise, as the hunter allowed his horse to walk around to a point a few yards away, where Lancaster was earnestly discussing some matter with several of his friends.

"That's cool," muttered the Yankee, as he gazed after him, "but I swan, I think it served me about right; that ere Lancaster knows more about the prairies, and the mountains and Indians in one week than I could learn in my life time; so, after this, I'll keep still that is so far as giving advice is concerned, though I do think I might give him a good idea now and then."

As Lancaster was talking about something which interested all, Swipes concluded to join the group around him, and learn what it all meant. Just as he did so, it seemed matters reached a decision.

"I'm satisfied," said Lancaster, with a decided shake of his head, "I know just what point them dogs are aiming at."

"Where is that?"

"The Chevenine Hills."

"And where are they?" asked several.

The trapper turned his head, as if he expected to see them, and then answered.

The guide now spoke as a man speaks who has been long debating a matter in his mind, and has at length reached a decision.

"I might have knowed you couldn't see the Chevenine Hills; they're off to the South, a good fifty miles from here. There's many a traveler that remembers them, for it's a great place for Apaches; they hide in there, and you never see nothin' of 'em, till they come yelling and whooping down from the hills and woods, and sail through the train, shouting, tomahawking and raising all the hair they can. That's where these dogs have gone, or have started to go and we must head them off."

"Why do you think so?" ventured several who felt this was too serious a matter to run much risk about.

"If any of you had ever seen the place you wouldn't ax me the question. The reason why I think so is this: The Chevenine Hills may be said to be the gate of the Apache country—that is from a hundred miles around these parts. From here to there is a broad level plain, and south of them for a hundred miles stretches a low level valley, making the best kind of a country for traveling for horses and men, while if you take any other route, you've mighty rough traveling through the mountains, and canons and rocks."

"But have they not got too far ahead of us?"

"Don't think they have; they've got only a few hours' start, and have gone along the eastern ridge which would carry them ten miles to the north till they got pretty near the hills, when they'd have to bend to the right of course. Then they've got the gal and they'll travel more careful than if they hadn't her; for when a feller is in love with a gal he's mighty careful how he treats her. Isn't that so, Fred Wainwright?"

"How should I know?" responded the young hunter, his face turning the color of scarlet.

"You're right," Leonidas Swipes hastened to say. I can answer that question by experience. When a young man is in love, he's sure to treat his young lady as tender as if she's a sick kitten."

"You see we'll take the western side or ridge of this plain; this will keep the two parties so far apart that there'll be no danger of our running together, and we'll do some pretty sharp riding and get there ahead and be ready to nab 'em when they come up."

"Suppose we are mistaken after all," remarked Mr. Templeton.

"How do you mean?" enquired Lancaster.

"They may get in ahead of us."

"Can't do it," was the decided reply. "If we're mind to put our horses to it, we can get six hours ahead of 'em."

"But they may have taken another route."

"All I've got to say then, Mr. Templeton, is that if you know so much you'd better take charge of the business and work it out to suit yourself."

Mr. Templeton looked at the wrathful trapper a moment, then quietly smiled and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Now you don't say so, Ward, do you? Are you really in '*airnest*'? Let's take a *chaw*."

With which he thrust an enormous plug of tobacco under the nose of the trapper, who was compelled to smile in spite of himself.

"I guess I'll take a *chaw*," said he, thrusting the whole piece in his mouth and then changing his mind, and wrenching off about a third he added as he stowed the rest somewhere about his person.

"In course you don't want it after it has been in my mouth, so I'll just save it till I want another *chaw*. Come, boys, we're losing time; let's be off."

And without parleying further, Ward Lancaster struck his horse into a rapid gallop, the others following rapidly behind.

"Git up! Confound you!" called out Swipes, "I

sawan if I can get this horse off this infarnal trot which nearly jolts the life out of me."

But at this point, the animal broke into a rapid canter, and it may be said that the real journey began. It was yet early in the day, and the horses being fresh, and numbering the very best that the emigrant train could afford, they were fully able to bear a strain.

And the guide did not spare them. He took the eastern route, where the traveling was somewhat rougher, and his gallop soon grew into what almost was a run. The sun reached the meridian, and still he did not show any signs of abating his sped. When it was considerably past, they reined up near a small stream, watered their horses and gave them a breathing spell.

Leonidas Swipes rode up beside the guide and said,

"I say, Mr. Lancaster, wouldn't it be a rather good idea to—that is to take lunch just now?"

"You can stay and eat if you choose, but the rest of us don't wait for that; or they can eat on the way, but we don't stop agin till we're among the Chevenine Hills. Come, boys, we've no time to wait."

And they remounted and sped away."

CHAPTER XII.

THE APACHE GORGE.

Lancaster the guide, in his reference to the Chev-nine Hills, had described them quite aptly. A long sweep of level country, containing thousands of square miles, was divided by a ridge of hills, which after making a long sweep went straight across the country. At one point in this wild ridge, there was a pass through which the Indians traveling north and south naturally made their way, in preference to climbing and clambering for a quarter of a mile through and over rocks, chasms and gorges, dangerous to horses and sometimes to men. This was the famous "Apache Gorge."

This famous spot was notorious to emigrants for its danger. Those who were journeying toward the most southermost part of California generally passed thro' the gorge, and those who did as if wise were fully prepared for an assault from the vigilant Apaches or Pah Utahs. Indeed many preferred when it was possible to labor through the hills, when such a thing was within the range of human possibility, in preference to braving the perilous pass.

It was this point at which the trapper had aimed, and toward which he pressed his horse to the utmost. It was scarcely past noon when he pointed to a ridge rising in the sky, clearly defined against the blue horizon beyond, which he informed them were the Chev-nine Hills, and he was soon able to locate precisely the "Apache Gorge."

"There's the spot," he added an hour or two later,

"where if the gal is ever seen again you've got to lay hands on her. If the redskins get through there with her I don't see as there is much chance of our getting sight of her."

If the two parties, the Indians and whites were approaching the Apache Gorge at the same moment, it will be seen that they must rapidly converge. The former it was supposed, (and there was every reason for believing it to be the fact.) were coming down the eastern, while the latter were following the western ridge. As both had the same objective point, as a matter of course they were rapidly nearing each other, and must finally come together.

Whichever party reached the Gorge first, it may be said, commanded the situation. If the Apaches had passed through, the fact in itself was evidence of a speed which would carry them safely beyond danger. If they had not done so, then it only remained for the whites to make their arrangements and await their approach.

The whites now saw the keen wisdom and foresight of their guide. What apparently seemed a rash risk on his part, it was now plain was the only plan which offered the least success, and was the only one which in any degree could deceive the Indians themselves. In the first place in penetrating their destination was a fine exploit which won half the battle, and in the next place, the course of leaving the trail and heading off the Indians was the only plan of surprising them—and in this lay the only hope of rescue.

Beyond a doubt, the Indians expected to be pursued. Where would they look for their pursuers behind or in front? Had they any reason to believe or even to suspect that there was any one among the emigrants shrewd enough to suspect the Apache Gorge? Was it likely that one man in a thousand, in attempting to follow an enemy would take any other course than follow his trail. Who so audacious

as to strike across the country and seek to head him off? Seeing nothing of the whites as they neared the pass, there was scarcely a possibility that they would expect to find them *there*.

All this we say the party saw, and gladly acknowledged the superior sagacity of the unlettered guide. Mr. Templeton, offering the trapper a segar, said,

"Ward, I've something to tell you."

"Wal, let's hear it then."

They were now within a few miles of the hills, and were riding at a more leisurely gait.

"I have just found out that you know more in five minutes than all the rest of us here knew in our lifetimes."

"You mean about the prairies and Injin signs?"

"Exactly."

"Wal, all I've got to say," said the trapper with a broad grin, as he proceeded to light his segar. "I wouldn't have to know much to know that; you're the biggest set of lunkheads I think I ever came across, always barring Fred here, who hasn't been out in these parts a great while, but long enough to learn and keep his mouth shet when them as knows more are talking."

"Well, that is a very modest way of accepting a compliment," laughed Templeton. "I supposed you might perhaps find it possible to say a word or two in our favor?"

"Hoogh! wagh!" laughed Ward, shaking his whole body by the violence of his convulsions. "If axed to pick out the biggest set of jackasses that ever got loose, I'd hurry up powerful quick and lasso this crowd. I'd have 'em sure."

"I—I—trust you would not place me in that category," said Leonidas Swipes, fondly expecting he would except him on account of his learning and accomplishments.

"No; I'd stand you out alone by yourself, as hav-

ing more of the jackass in you than all the rest put together."

The loud laughter which followed this somewhat discomfited the Yankee, who, however, made a dispairing effort to recover his lost ground.

"And where would you place yourself, if I may ask, Mr. Lancaster?"

"Where there was the least danger of seeing *you*, but, come, boys, we're losing time."

Just as the sun was sinking over the western ridge of the Chevenine Hills, the party drew rein and slowly approached the Apache Gorge. While yet some distance, Fred Wainright had dismounted, and entering the wood cautiously, made his way to the dangerous spot, to reconnoitre, and to see that no ambush threatened. Discovering nothing to excite alarm, he appeared on a high rock, and waved his hand as a signal that all was right. A few minutes later the horses thundered underneath the thick trees and vegetation that wrapped the hills from peak to base, and the wearied riders dismounted to rest and refresh themselves.

All were wearied and dusty, yet the guide said,

"It won't do to stay here; there's a good camping ground farther in."

He led the way for a quarter of a mile in a westerly direction, where they found a stream of icy cold water which issued from the mountain side, and an abundance of rich rank grass. Here their animals were tethered, and Lancaster told the men that they might lunch and rest themselves, while he and Fred Wainwright would return to the Gorge and keep watch for the Apaches. The cool shadow and the soft grass were so welcome that the remainder of the party immediately stretched themselves out upon the ground to enjoy the luxury of that perfect rest, when it succeeds perfect exhaustion and weariness.

Reaching the Gorge the two hunters clambered up among the hills, until they were elevated several hun-

dred feet above the plain and had a view of the surrounding country for many miles. It was yet very light, and nothing obstructed their view except the horizon itself.

When they had reached an available spot, Fred Wainwright turned his head, looked one moment toward the north and uttered the thrilling words,

"Yonder they come!"

The trapper squinted his eyes for a moment, looked long and searchingly, and then replied as coolly as if he had asked for a chew of tobacco.

"You're right, that's Charouka and his Apaches, *sartin!*"

Off to the north-east, precisely in the direction indicated by the guide, a party of a half a dozen horsemen were seen approaching at a sweeping gallop. To the ordinary eye they were a half a dozen horsemen and nothing more; but the keen vision of the trapper of the Gila saw among them the object of their search. Florence Brandon held in front of an Apache Indian, who was no other than the famed Charouka.

The redskins were only a few miles distant, and would reach the Gorge within half an hour at the most. As the two surveyed them a moment, the young hunter suddenly turned to the older one.

"Suppose Ward they make no halt but pass on through?"

"What of it? They won't go far. More likely they'll stop here and kindle their fires," replied the guide, rolling his huge tobacco quid from one side of his cheek to the other.

"Don't you wish to let the others know what is going on?"

"No; let them be; they're sound asleep and better off than here. We can't do any thing until after dark, when the time for work will be on us. Till then why we'll just watch."

The Apache party rapidly approached, and as they neared the Gorge they came down to a walk. By

this time they were so near that their features could be distinguished, and the young hunter looked upon the pale face of the fair captive with strange emotions.

She was held by the giant Cherouka directly in front of him. One arm was thrown around her as if to keep her from falling, while with the other he attended to himself. Although he grasped her firmly, yet it was not roughly. It was that grasp with which we hold the being we are unwilling to give up, and yet which we love with all the fondness and affection that our whole nature can summon,

Florence was seated in the usual lady-like fashion, as if she were supported by the ordinary "side-saddle," her long dress sweeping almost the length of the horse's body and shrouding her own feet, and the moccaised limit of the wild Apache from view. Her lang dark hair was streaming over her shoulders, her face was white and deathly, and there was a wild agonized look in her dark eyes, which ought to have moved the hearts of the brutes which surrounded her, but which, as may well be imagined, did not affect their sensibilities in the slightest degree.

O how the young hunter longed to raise his rifle as they came within range and send his bullet through the brain of the treacherous Apache. But he was too sensible a fellow to do any such thing, even if he had forgotten that he was under the orders of his older companion.

True to the prediction of the latter, they rode a short distance through the Gorge, and then turning a little aside, dismounted, and made their preparations for a nlght encampment.

Florence was assisted gallantly to the ground, and allowed to take a seat near a tree, removed a few feet or so from the others, while they merely glanced at her as they moved hither and thither, Cherouka, however scarcely moving his eyes from her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUE.

The Apaches had scarcely halted, when one of their number was observed to walk back toward the mouth of the gorge where he stationed himself. The two hunters looked at each other and smiled significantly, while Lancaster gave his younger companion a nudge in the side.

"How does that look, Fred? All right, aint it?"

"Yes; there hasn't been a failure to-day in anything you have said or done."

"Wal," said the trapper with a complacent yawn, "if a feller hunts and traps for thirty years among the redskins, he ought to know *somethin'* about 'em, hadn't he?"

"Of course."

"That's all about it then; if you had been in my place, may be you'd've knowed pretty near as much. But that's neither here nor there. Things look good; now I tell you what must be done, Fred. It's time the boys were waked up and got ready; I'll go up and bring them and the animals down where they'll be handy, and then we'll see what's to be done, whether we're to sarcumvent 'em or to sail in and knock 'em over."

"Am I to remain here!"

"You'll stay here till I come back and we'll arrange things."

And the next minute the trapper was gone.

Left alone, Fred Wainwright looked cautiously about him, and then, so far as the gathering darkness of the imperfect light of the small camp-fire would permit, saw the position of matters. The Apaches had kindled a fire, and were cooking a large piece of meat over it; Florence was seated on the ground about a dozen feet back of them, not secured or bound in any manner.

Why need she be? What chance had she of fleeing? Was there ever a moment when the black eyes of an Apache were not fixed upon her, and were those of Cherouka ever removed? No; she was too sensible of thinking of such a step.

Yet as the keen eyes of the young hunter rested upon the scene, he saw there was an opportunity which might never come again. If she could only be apprised of the proximity of her friends, there was no reason why she should not give her enemies the slip. At any rate, he had looked but a few minutes when he determined to make the attempt.

Good fortune which had favored our friends so far, caused the encampment to be on the western side of the gorge, the same as that occupied by the hunters, and where now Fred Wainwright began creeping stealthily forward toward the captive.

He was too experienced a hunter to attempt anything like this, unless there was a good prospect of success. He was as certain, as any one could be of the most certain of all things, that when his friends were gathered together, and made a charge upon the Indians, they could scatter them like chaff, and retake Florence Brandon without the danger of a scratch to her. Consequently nothing like the present would be attempted, if there was cause for the least fear of precipitating matters.

Our hero reached a point about twenty feet not in the rear but at one side of the girl, and then paused to deliberate upon the best method of apprising her of his presence. Carefully scrutinizing everything around

him, he finally searched on the ground until he found a small pebble which he tossed so dexterously that it dropped in her lap. She instantly raised her head and looked toward the Indians evidently thinking it came from them. This was the critical moment; and Fred improved it, by flinging another one as skilfully as before.

This accomplished its mission. Florence Brandon knew that a friend was near at hand, and she signified her understanding of matters by glancing quickly in the direction from which the pebble came and giving a quick wave of the hand.

"Good!" muttered the hunter, "she understands; she is as bright and keen as ever."

Creeping still closer until he had reached a point, beyond which he dare not pass, he paused to make sure that his situation would admit his acting as he had determined to do in case he made an attempt to rescue the captive. Behind him the wood and shrubbery were of impenetrable darkness, so that he could maneuver in them to the best advantage.

Now that he was sure the ear of the girl was strained to catch the slightest sound, he waited but a moment, and then whispered,

"*This way, quick!*"

She turned her head, glanced fearfully around her, and then rising to her feet, ran rapidly and lightly toward the young hunter. She had gone but a dozen steps or so, when an exclamation of Cherouka showed that he had discovered the attempt, and he darted after her. He evidently believed it a despairing attempt upon her part, done without the connivance of any one, and he intended to bring her back with the least trouble to herself and without any outcry or demonstration, so far as he was able to prevent it.

The other Apaches witnessed the whole thing, but very probably they concluded if Cherouka intended to make a wife of the "pale face," it was about time he commenced the "breaking in" process, and they

therefore continued their attention to the roasting antelope.

Fred Wainwright stood in a crouching position until Florence Brandon reached him, when he whispered hurriedly,

"*Don't stop; we'll take care of you; run on, and I will attend to this gentleman.*"

Cherouka came straight ahead until he had reached a point only a few steps behind the girl, and his arm was outstretched to seize her, when a dark body suddenly arose to his feet, and the next moment to use an elegant expression, "the first thing he knew he didn't know anything," for he was felled senseless by the crashing blow of Fred Wainright dealt straight in his face.

Thus far, thus well. The hunter now whirled on his heel, and started after the flying girl. She was too startled to comprehend that it was a friend instead of an enemy who was pursuing her, and she fled all the faster. Not until they had run quite a distance, and he had called to her several times in as loud a tone as he deemed prudent, did she pause and wait for him to come up.

"Oh! is that you, Mr. Wainwright?" she asked trembling like an affrighted bird, hardly daring to trust her senses, and ready to dart away again.

"Yes; there is no need of this hurry, Miss Brandon; they don't suspect you have had help and we can take matters more leisurely."

"Where is Cherouka?"

"I don't think he will trouble you very soon."

"You haven't killed him?" she asked, her heart recoiling at the thought.

"No; he merely ran against my fist; he will be alive and kicking and howling in a few moments."

"Oh! let us hurry then, for I would rather die than let him get me again,"

"No fear I think."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes, except there are ten of our men waiting for us a short distance from here."

"Oh! how thankful I am; let us hasten to them before it is too late."

"Please take my arm; and we may be able to travel faster."

She did so, and they walked forward as fast as the nature of the ground would permit.

As yet there was no outcry or clamor from the Apache camp, proof that the real flight of the girl had not been discovered.

"How much farther away are our friends?"

"Only a short distance; we will meet them in a few minutes."

"And you think they cannot get us—the Indians will not follow and kill you and take me back again."

"They may pursue us; but as to getting you into their hands again, that is a far different matter, and one about which there will be a little fun if they attempt it."

"Oh! I cannot realize that I am safe again; and you have followed us all the way?"

"Not exactly; Lancaster the guide, knew they were making for this point, and so we hurried and got here ahead of them."

"Did you see us come?"

"Yes; we or rather I have had my eyes on you for the last hour or more, but we waited until it was dark——"

"Hark!"

"I swan if I didn't run my chin over a limb that time, and it nearly sawed my neck off."

"Keep your mouth shut or you'll spile the whole game. Hello! there's somebody here. That you Wainwright?"

"Yes; I am here, Ward, all right."

"And the gal?"

"Is with me."

"Good for you! you're a tramp—hello!"

At this instant, a succession of yells was heard from the direction of the Apache camp, proclaiming that Cheronka had come to his senses, and the redskins were at work.

"Let 'em yell," muttered the guide, as he noticed some trepidation among those around him, "what can they do?"

"But they may get torches—that is, as it were,—and follow us," ventured Mr. Swipes, "but, Miss Brandon, allow me to congratulate you on your successful escape from the Indians."

"Yes; let's hear how it was" said several as the two young persons appeared among the overjoyed whites, who gathered around them and shook their hands again and again.

Fred Wainwright related in a few brief words, how he had seen there was a good chance to get her away from the Indians without waiting for the return of his friend. At its conclusion the latter said,

"Well, you saved us a fight any way; and I s'pose that suits the gal better. Let's mount and be off. Fred, we've only 'leven animals and there be 'leven of us. I'm mighty afraid you'll have to take the gal on your hoss with you."

This was nothing very dreadful, and the young people managed to survive it. Strange emotions thrilled the heart of Fred Wainwright, as he held the dear being close to him, and several times he was on the point of giving utterance to the tumultuous feelings which thronged upward,—but he restrained himself. **The time had not yet come.**

All night long they traveled their progress being necessarily slow. Nothing more was heard of their pursuers, and at daylight they halted on the ridge not more than half their distance accomplished.

"I will ascend to the top of the ridge and take observations. I swan if feel quite safe!" remarked Mr. Swipes as he clambered to the top. Reaching the backbone of the ridge, he took a careful survey of the

opposite plain which stretched far away to the South and South-West.

The next moment a loud shout was heard from the Yankee, and he was seen dancing and flinging his arms like a lunatic. All eyes were turned wonderingly toward him.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

Leonidas Swipes continued dancing, shouting and gesticulating like a madman. He threw his hat in air, and, as it came down stamped upon it, turned somerset, hooted like an Indian, and finally shouted to the upturned faces below him.

"By jingo! just come up here! Did you ever see such a sight! Ki 'yi!" and he executed another double shuffle as a vent to his superabundant glee.

Fred Wainwright finally accepted the invitation and clambered up beside him.

"Just look off there!" shouted the Yankee, before the man has fairly reached him, "aint that enough to make your eyes sparkle? I swan! Ki 'yi!"

The next moment, the young hunter saw that the fellow had good cause for his unusual excitement; for there, right below him, were resting the five thousand and odd sheep, which the Comanches had taken so unceremoniously from him a few days before. Their multitudinous *baaing*, made it a source of wonder that their proximity had not been suspected ere this.

It was yet early in the morning, and the sheep were resting from the severe marching to which they had been subjected. The Indians could be seen, scattered here and there on the outer confines of the immense drove, where any stampede would be sure instantly to arouse them. Here they were slumbering their faithful animals cropping the grass close beside them, where they could be reached in a second's call.

One Comanche had just risen, and stood leaning against his horse, and appeared to be yawning and gaping. As there was eminent danger of Swipes being seen, Fred pushed him down from his perch

" You want to alarm them, do you, and have them all get away, not that you have a chance to recover your property?"

" Well, I swan it makes a feller feel so good that it don't make much difference whether I get 'em back agin or not."

" Little good will it do you, then. Let's go down again and have consultations with Ward, and decide upon our means of recapturing them."

" But wont they give us the slip while we're talking?"

" Not much."

" I guess I'll stay here and watch while you go down and make the arrangements. Be as quick as you can."

" Come along; you'll get to dancing and hooting again and alarm the whole country, so don't wait."

The prospect of recapturing the entire herd of sheep was too tempting to pass by. When a man sees an opportunity of recovering a fortune lost, is he apt to shut his eyes and turn his back upon it?" Not much.

The arrangements were soon made. Ward Lancaster, Fred Wainwright and four of the best mounted men, dismounted and led their horses up the ridge, and as carefully descended on the opposite side. Here they remounted, consulted a few moments, and then with a series of resounding whoops, dashed around the southern side of the drove, firing their guns at the Camaaches at the same time.

The latter comprehending that the game was up, vaulted upon their mustangs and sped away like an arrow over the prairie, firing as they rode. In a few minutes, the entire body of sheep was in motion to the northward. They kept along the western side of the ridge, while Florence Brandon and her friends followed the eastern slope, both parties instantly remaining within call of each other.

In the afternoon of the same day, the entire company united with the emigrant train and the march westward was resumed.

Messrs. Swipes, Bircham and Doolittle with the occasional assistance of the others kept the sheep drove in motion losing a very slight per cent. When the point was reached where they were to divide, they met a party from Sacramento who were going east to purchase sheep and cattle. They had an abundance of funds, and, after considerable bantering, they took the entire flock off of Swipe's hands, giving him thirty thousand dollars.

The Yankee divided the money as he had agreed, with his companions, and compelled Lancaster and several others to take quite a handsome present.

"And now," said he, as the three set their faces toward San Francisco, "I'm going hum."

"But how about the Fort Mifflin Institute for the Education of the Youths of both Sexes?" inquired Fred Wainwright.

Fort Mifflin Institute be hanged. I'm going hum to buy Deacon Popkin's farm and settle down with Araminta."

And home he went.

It was a beautiful day in spring time some years ago, and the emigrant train was proceeding leisurely through Southern California. It was within a few days of its destination. A few hundred yards in the rear of the company, a lady and gentleman were riding, their horses walking closely together, while the riders conversed in those slow sweet tones, so unceremoniously by persons under such circumstances. They were our old acquaintances, Fred Wainwright and Florence Brandon. There was a peculiar smile on the face of the latter, as she said, after a moment's lull in the conversation.

"Do you suppose Mr. Fred Wainwright, that I do not know who you are?"

He looked inquiringly at her.

"What do you mean?"

"You are Mr. Frederick Ashland, of Missouri."

"Florence! Florence, who has betrayed me?"

"No one, but yourself, on the night you so nobly

rescued me from the Apaches. I penetrated your disguise."

"Why didn't you let me know it?"

"I thought I would wait and see your object in thus remaining INCOGNITO; but I can't divine your meaning, as I thought I would let you know that I generally keep my eyes shut. Mr. Frederick Ashland, what is the cause of this?"

"You."

"Please explain."

"You know after we were engaged, I called several times to see you, and was told you were out. I felt hurt very much at this, as I knew it was untrue. Finally, when I concluded to go to California, I made up my mind I would call and bid you good bye, your aunt, Miss Sillingsby told me you positively refused to see me, and I received a note which I had sent unopened. This was the last drop in the bucket and I left you, resolved never to look on you again, and I should never have done so until we were so strangely brought together, and I believed you did not suspect my identity."

Whereupon Florence told how she had been deceived; that Miss Sillingsby had taken a fancy to a rich old crusty bachelor, and resolved that Florence should marry him. She had started the false message between the two, and finally succeeded in making both believe that the other had committed the transgression, and hopelessly estranged them.

But now all was made right—and well, we have nothing more to say. Our readers can fill in the minor details of a little scene at Fort Mifflin a few months later, when Miss Sillingsby had the chagrin and the others the exquisite pleasure of seeing our hero and heroine made happy in each other's love.

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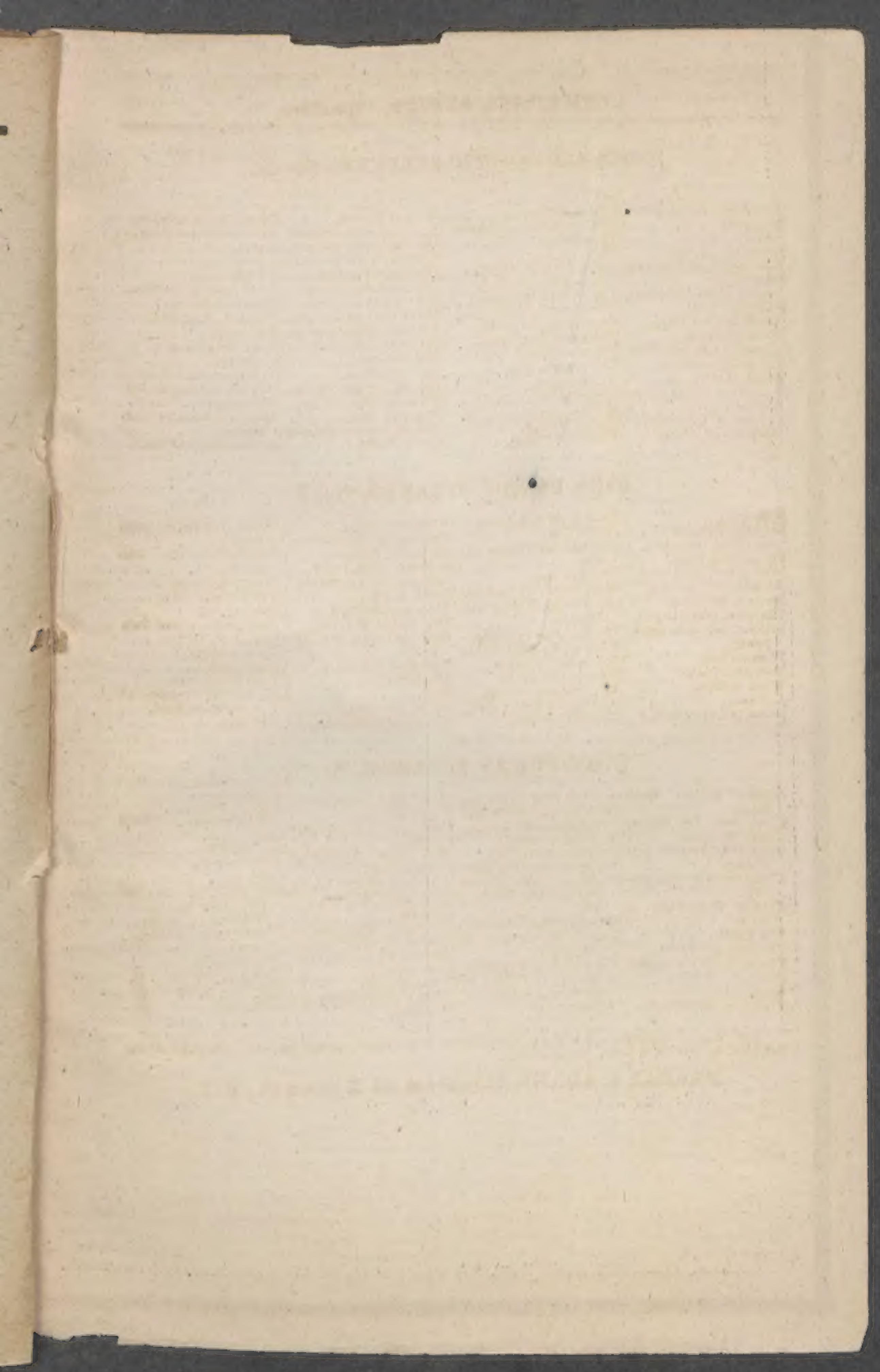
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